No.43

NINE LIVES OF THE FLYING TIGER

Volume 1: America's Secret Air Wars in Asia, 1945–1950

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We always welcome receiving book proposals from prospective authors.

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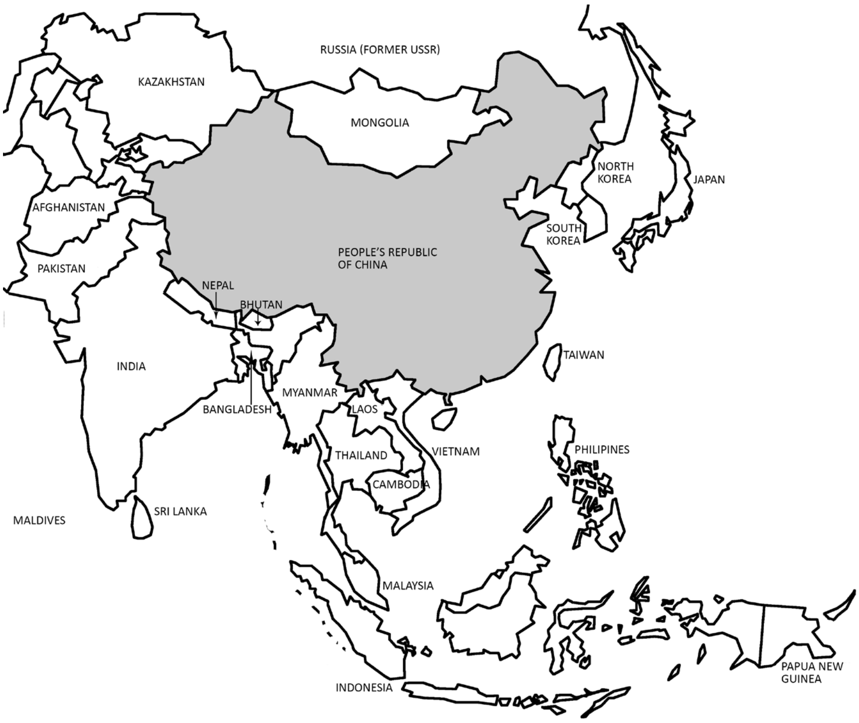
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Note: In order to simplify the use of this book, all names, locations and geographic designations are as provided in *The Times World Atlas*, or other traditionally accepted major sources of reference, as of the time of described events.

ABBREVIATIONS

AA	Anti-Aircraft
CAMCO	Central Aircraft Manufacturing Corporation
CNAC	China National Aviation Corporation
CNRRA	Chinese National Relief and Rehabilitation Administration
CAT	Civil Air Transport
CATC	Central Air Transport Corporation
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency (USA)
CNAF	Chinese Nationalist Air Force
LST	Landing Ship, Tank
JUSMAG	Joint United States Military Advisory Group
KMT	Kuomintang – The Nationalist Party of China
OPC	Office of Policy Coordination
POW	Prisoner of War
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PLAAF	People's Liberation Army Air Force
RAF	Royal Air Force
UNRRA	United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration
USMC	United States Marine Corps
USAF	United States Air Force
USAAF	United States Army Air Force
USMC	United States Marine Corps

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All of them provided extensive aid over the years in one form or another, of related research and eventually made this book possible. We decided to use the transliteration of Chinese names by using the older, Wade Giles system as most of our sources had been translated on this system. Furthermore, many places had their names changed. Consequently, in order to avoid mistakes, we stuck to Wade Giles but also translated them using the new Pinyin system now widely accepted.

1

THE ORIGIN OF THE AMERICAN SECRET AIR WARS IN ASIA

The famed American Volunteer Group (AVG) created in August 1941, under the command of Claire Lee Chennault, set an example of heroism for the American public at the onset of the Second World War. This band of volunteer aviators serving under the Chinese government, tried to stem the tide of the Japanese onslaught throughout Southeast Asia. Amid chaos and resounding defeats of the Western powers in the area, the AVG fought tenaciously and inflicted heavy blows to the Japanese. Its tally, sometimes exaggerated, was highly publicised in the United States to sustain a flagging public morale.

Better known as the 'Flying Tigers', in the coming decades, the AVG set the legacy of further United States clandestine air wars in Asia and elsewhere in the world. The use of covert air power to support American political aims would become a trademark of Washington policy. From the inception of the AVG onwards, the name of Claire Lee Chennault was associated with paramilitary and secret air operations on behalf of the United States Government in Asia. However, if his involvement in China in late 1930s is well documented, as well as his tenure as commander of the USAAF 14th Air Force, his involvement in various clandestine air operations after the Second World War is far less well known.

It is noteworthy to recall the career of the very man at the centrepiece of all these endeavours and also necessary to come back to the origins of Washington's policy in China. By the early 1930s, China seemed pacified and reunited after a long period of

GULF OF SIAM
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TH

A portrait of Lieutenant General Claire Lee Chennault, who laid the foundation of the US secret air wars strategy in Asia, from the 1930s up to the Cold War period. (USAF) turmoil since the collapse of the Qing imperial dynasty in 1911. The Nationalist Kuomintang – KMT (Guomindang – GMD) Chinese Nationalist Party, had consolidated its power after its 'Northern Expedition' by defeating the various warlords or inveigling them to its cause.

The newly installed Nanking (Nanjing) government, under the leadership of Chiang Kai Shek (Jiang Jieshi), now turned towards what was perceived the most pressing remaining threat, the Chinese Communist Party. Even if both parties had allied themselves at an early stage, the massacres carried out against the Reds in Shanghai in April 1927, broke any semblance of relationship. The KMT wanted to bolster and strengthen its armed forces to reinforce its control over the huge country and to quell the Communists, even at the expense of countering the expansionist moves made by Tokyo.

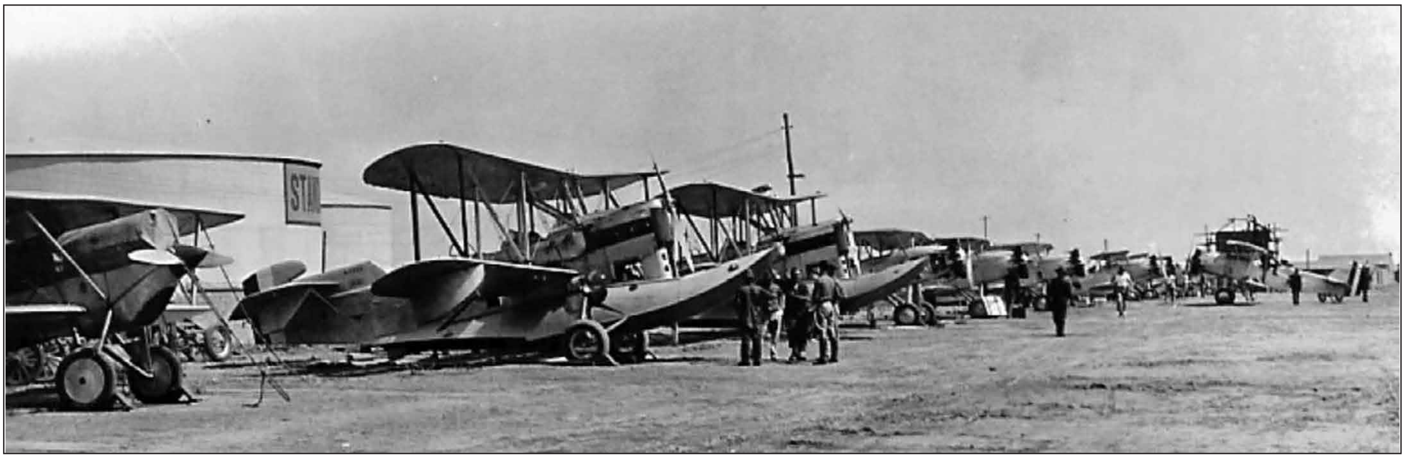
2

CHINA MARINES – THE FIRST DEPLOYMENT OF US AIR POWER IN CHINA

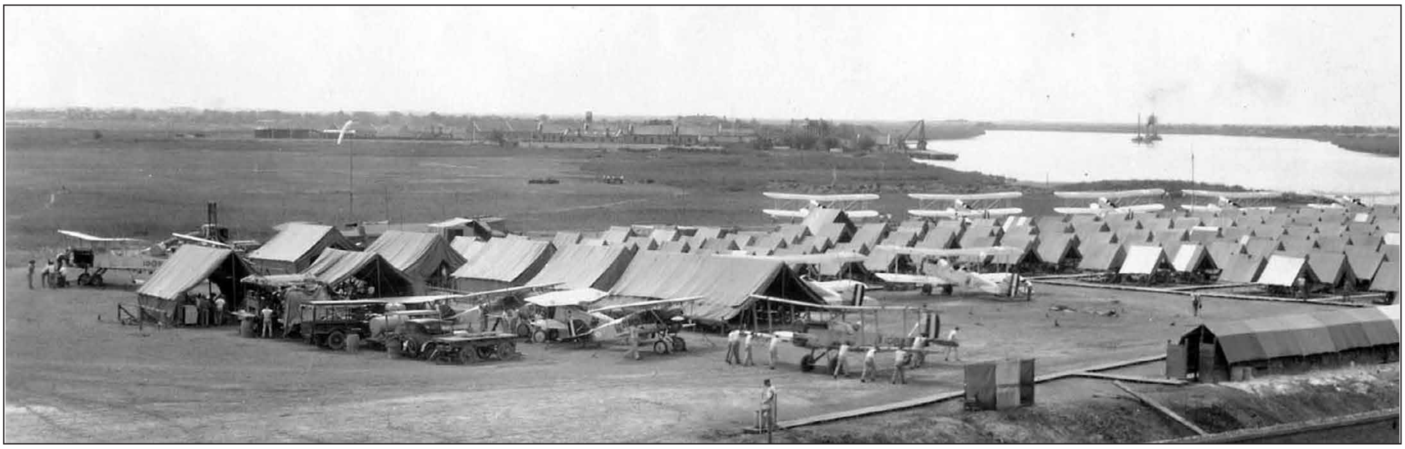
When Chiang Kai Shek decided to launch the 'Northern Expedition' in 1926 to reunify China under a central government, the fighting that ensued threatened the foreign concessionary settlements. The United Kingdom, France, Japan, Italy and Belgium reinforced their troops in these areas. However, apart from the United States, none decided to deploy aircraft to bolster their forces. With the exception of the Germans who used two Etrich Taube monoplanes at their treaty port of Tsingtao in 1914 against the Japanese and British troops, it was the first time a foreign power decided to introduce air power in China.

By acting in such a way, Washington ran the risk of escalation with the warring parties involved in the reunification campaign, as some of them were also deploying military aircraft. However, the local American lives and interests, including the Christian Protestant missions, resulted in the USMC 3rd Brigade, with artillery and tanks, sailing from San Diego for Shanghai in February 1927. Two USMC air squadrons, the VF-3M with 10 Boeing FB-1 pursuit aircraft and the VO-5M Observation Squadron with a composite strength of six Curtiss 02B-1s and four Airco DH-4Bs, were sent to support Brigadier General Smedley D. Butler's expeditionary force.

After a stop in the Philippines, both squadrons moved to Tientsin to support the USMC 4th Regiment. Commanded initially by Major Francis T. Evans, then by Lieutenant Colonel Turner, the units operated from Camp MacMurray, Hsin Ho, a pasture flattened into an airfield, some 60km from Tientsin. Isolated from the rest of the Marine brigade and with columns of troops of various Chinese armies frequently marching past them, the Marine aviators soon organised protection parties and mounted machine guns on their hangars and barracks.



A general overview of the parking area of the Camp MacMurray, Hsin Ho, in 1928 where the USMC air detachment in China was based. Some six Curtiss 02B-1s, two Loening OL-6 amphibians and a Boeing FB-1 can be seen. (USMC)



Another general view of Camp MacMurray in 1927. Most of the personnel and workshops were still installed in tents. Barracks and hangars would be later erected for better accommodation. (USMC)

Marines lined up for an inspection in front of some Loening OL-6s of the VO-10M at Camp MacMurray. (USMC)

In July 1928, the VF-3M was redesignated VF-6M due to a reorganisation of US naval aviation assets. These two squadrons were later reinforced by six Loening OL-6 amphibians of the VO-10M. The squadrons flew 3,818 sorties, mostly in observation and photographic reconnaissance, mail transport and liaison missions. However, no combat occurred for the Marines during their stay until October 1928. There were five crashes but with no injuries to the crew.

One of the most spectacular accidents occurred on 10 November 1927 during an air exhibition of 14 aircraft to celebrate the Marine's Corps birthday. The FB-1 flown by Captain James T. Moore, after a low flying pass over the crowd, went into a breathtaking roll and lost the wings from the aircraft. The pilot bailed out and parachuted into a moat in front of the stand. Most spectators, unaware it had not been planned, thought it was the best show they had ever seen.

It was within this context that the United States decided it was in its best interests to further its influence in China and through this, into an Asia dominated by European colonial powers. The emergence of Japan was also perceived as a threat. Prior to the Northern Expedition, some American and European foreigners had been hired as mercenaries by the numerous warlords to serve as instructors and even participated in combat operations.

Chiang Kai Shek first from right, on a viewing stand at a graduation ceremony for one of the flight school classes at the Central Aviation School in 1934. First from left, Colonel John Jouett, director of training and aviation advisor to the Chinese government. (Malcolm Rosholt Collection)

Despite an international embargo on weapons sales being proclaimed, most Western powers continued to sell their military equipment, including aircraft, to war-torn China. In July 1932, responding to a request of the Chinese authorities to vastly expand the nascent Chinese Nationalist Air Force (CNAF), Washington dispatched an Aviation Mission under the command of the recently retired Colonel John Jouett to help restructure the CNAF. This was now a matter of urgency as the Japanese encroachment into Manchuria continued.

In May 1930, Tokyo imposed an Air Mission, under the command of Colonel Makino, on the local warlord, Chang Hsue Liang (who officially rallied to the central government of Chiang Kai Shek). The Japanese settled in Mukden with a detachment of fighters and light bombers, ostensibly for training the local air units.

The Chinese accepted the US offer to help restructure the CNAF against competing proposals from France, Italy, and United Kingdom. The Five-Year plan envisaged the raising up of a force of 27 squadrons and 432 aircraft. However, fearing arousing adverse reactions from Japan who had invaded Manchuria in 1931 and the 'Shanghai incident' the following year, the mission came from the Bureau of Domestic and Foreign Commerce rather than on behalf of the State or Army Departments.

With Japan increasing its encroachments into China, the situation gradually evolved into a type of Cold War between Tokyo and Washington and was one of the causes that eventually led to the Pearl Harbor attack. Setting an example for further American contribution, all the involved advisors were either recently discharged officers or reserve officers, engaged as civilian personnel.

The 15 man-strong American advisory mission departed San Francisco with an order to 'keep the organization and departure of this outfit secret'. It helped to design plans to expand the CNAF and improve its training system by creating a Central Aviation School in Shien Chiao, Hangshow, staffed by US instructors. The school

A general view of the Central Aviation School at Shien Chao in 1933. In the foreground are the cadet barracks. (Malcolm Rosholt Collection)

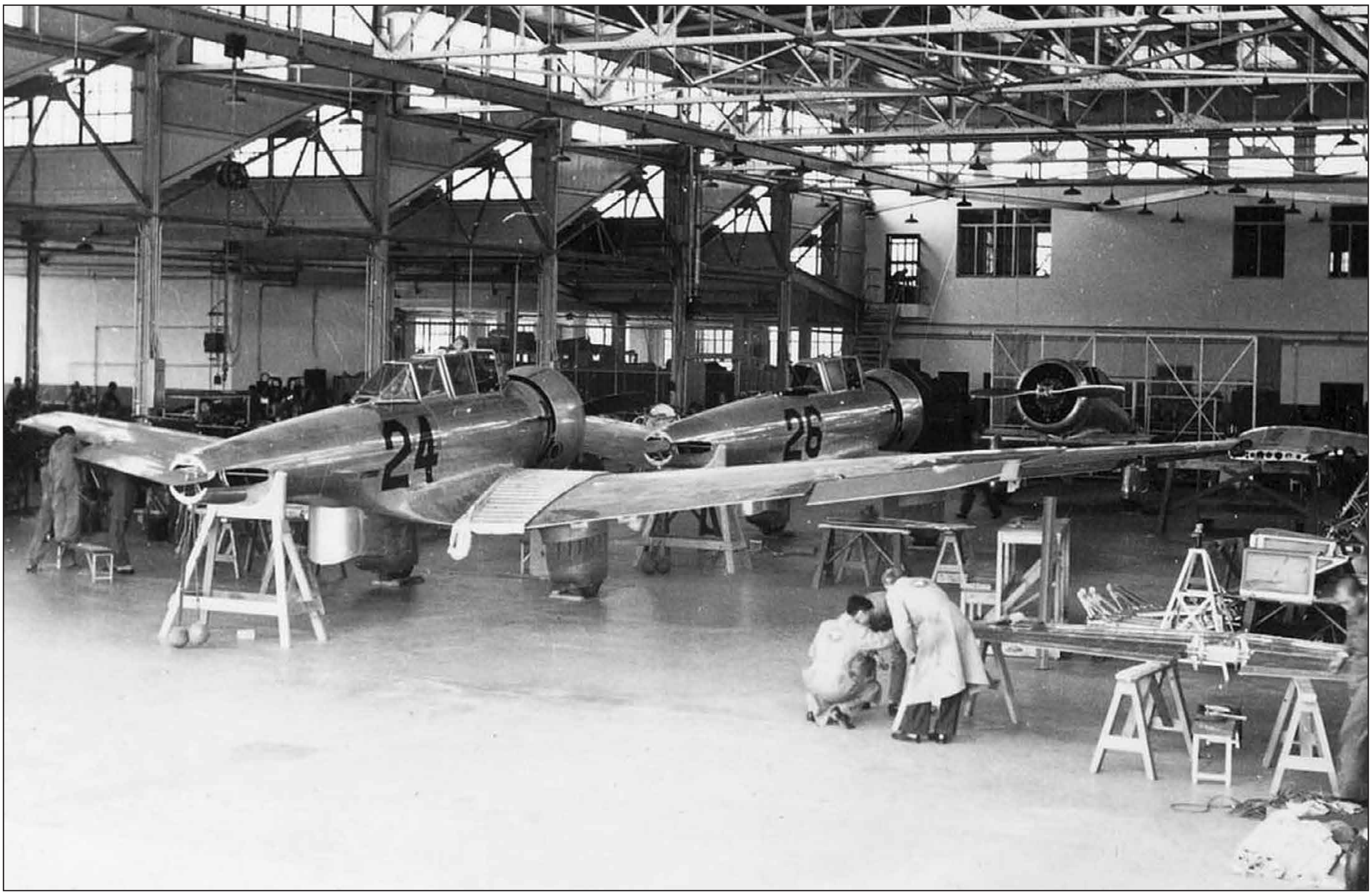
In June 1935, the Jouett Mission was disbanded over political objections from Chiang Kai Shek and put an end to the first US attempt to have an official Aviation Advisory Mission close to the Chinese government. However, the CNAF retained some of the American instructors at the Central Aviation School who were placed under the command of former Lieutenant Colonel George E. Reinburg on a direct contractual basis. Reinburg, pictured here, held the post only shortly, succumbing to a heart stroke six months later. However, he set the precedence for holding an informal post of aviation advisor, opening the way later for the recruitment of Claire Lee Chennault on the same basis. (Malcolm Rosholt Collection)

William D. Pauley, president of the CAMCO, the leading salesman of American aircraft in China. He would later be the co-founder of the AVG (Flying Tigers) with Chennault. (George Arnold Collection)

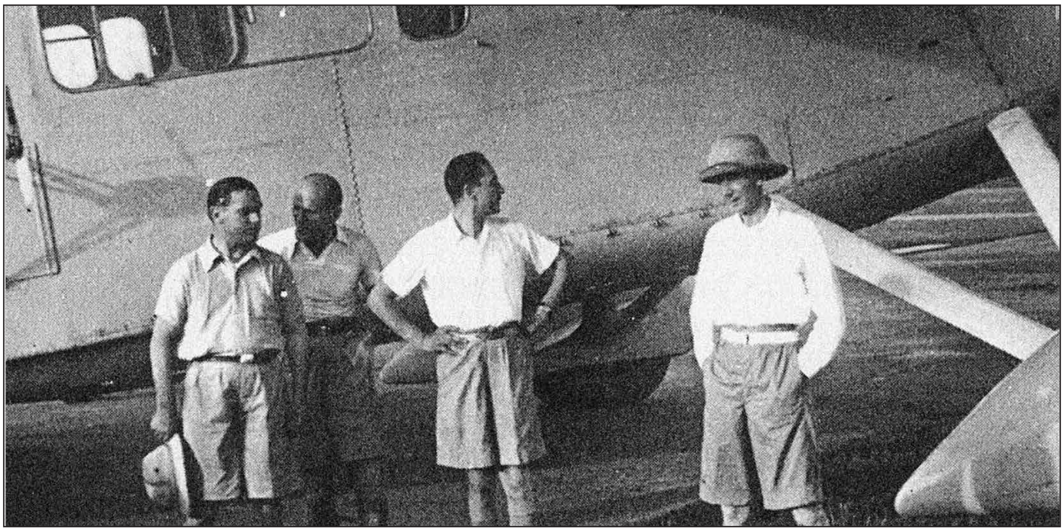
applied the US Army Air Corps training system, using the teaching and policies of Randolph Field and Kelly Field.

As in the United States, the courses at the school called for four months of primary training, four months of basic training and four months of advanced training. Under the US advisory tuition, the school graduated 335 cadets in two years.

In addition to directing the school, Jouett was also appointed as the principal aviation advisor to the Chinese government. His first step was to recommend that the Chinese Commission on Aviation Affairs be detached from the Ministry of War and be constituted



The assembly line of the Northrop Gamma light bombers at the CAMCO. Some 49 of them were acquired by the CNAF and equipped the 9th, 11th and 14th Squadrons in 1937. (George Arnold Collection)



Colonel Lodi was replaced by Colonel Silvio Scaroni as the head of the Italian air mission. Scaroni was particularly involved in setting up the new plant to assemble Italian aircraft at Nanchang. Seen here, first from left, beside one of the six Caproni 111 bombers that equipped the 10th Squadron in 1937. (AMI)

as a separate ministry, the Aeronautical Commission, equal to the Ministries of War and Navy – all three under the direct control of the National Military Council. To highlight its importance, the new aviation commission was put under the direct supervision of Chiang Kai Shek himself. He later handed over the post to his wife who dealt directly with her husband on crucial matters.

As a member of the board in charge of the purchase of aircraft, Jouett was able to promote the sales of American aircraft and practically two third of the procurements came from the United States. The board also advised the Chinese to expand and modernise their fledgling aviation industry by allowing American companies to settle in China and to assemble, under licence, various US aircraft types.

The contract was arranged by United Aircraft Export, a trading association that helped to set up the first, Chinese modern comprehensive aviation factory, the Central Aircraft Manufacturing Corporation (CAMCO) at Hangzhou in 1934. The CAMCO was a shareholding of the US Intercontinent Aviation Corporation, Douglas Aircraft Corporation and the Curtiss-Wright Corporation. It was this last company which would play a leading role by investing the most for assembling its aircraft in China and it was Curtiss-Wright who appointed one of the company top executives, William D. Pawley, as the Director of CAMCO.

Nevertheless, despite the great advances made by the CNAF under the guidance of the mission, it was mired by Chinese internal politics. Part of the KMT Party split and a rival Nationalist government was installed in Canton (Guangdong), coalescing around it, some former southern warlords. Both governments had their own air forces.

Chiang Kai Shek put an end to the Jouett mission in June 1935 when he learnt that the Americans were also selling warplanes to its southern rivals. Worse still, William D. Pawley was helping to establish another aviation factory – the Shaoguan Aircraft Factory – for the Canton Government. The situation was only resolved in 1936 when the southern wing of the KMT was brought back under Chiang Kai Shek's control.

The US mission was superseded by the Italian Air Mission, commanded by Colonel Roberto Lodi, which operated from May 1933. Lodi was replaced later by Colonel Silvio Scaroni who occupied the same post as Jouett, being the principal aviation advisor. Rome also helped to build a factory, the Sino-Italian National Aircraft Works, to assemble Italian aircraft at Nanchang. There was also a project to build under licence, the Breda Ba.65 ground attack aircraft and to assemble Fiat G.50 fighters. Eventually, the Italians provided a total of 104 aircraft to China.

Not willing to put all his eggs in the same basket, Chiang decided to reorganise the Army with the help of a German mission under the command of General Hans Von Seeckt. Nevertheless, strong links were retained with the USA and purchases of equipment and hiring of technical personnel and pilots as advisors, continued on a private basis. However, the Chinese now requested a new official 'civilian aviation' advisory mission from the Americans – but to no avail. Washington continued its cautious approach, trying not to directly confront Tokyo. By November 1936, there were 11 American instructors at the Central Aviation School in Luoyang, directed by former Lieutenant Colonel George E. Reinburg who also held the post of special aviation advisor to Chiang.

George E. Reinburg's tenure as aviation advisor was short-lived as he decided to return to United States for health problems. The Chinese were now in search for a new American to replace him, still hoping that Washington would sanction his posting as a special envoy of the US government.

3

ENTER CLAIRE LEE CHENNAULT

Meanwhile, the Japanese Foreign Office issued what was called the Amau Statement, named after Eiji Amau, Chief of the Intelligence Department. It boldly reaffirmed a type of Japanese Monroe Doctrine in Asia claiming China was in Japan's sphere of influence. After the Japanese occupation of Manchuria, Japan had continued to expand inside the Great Wall boundaries, attacking Shanghai, invading Inner Mongolia and attempting to make North China independent of the Nanking government.

Until now, the Chinese had made a series of compromises with the Japanese, sparing its forces to solve domestic problems, particularly the communist insurrection. Japan then demanded China enter an alliance with it to 'fight communism in Asia'. Chiang Kai Shek flatly rejected the Japanese ultimatum, knowing that would

Claire Lee Chennault, in the centre, with his two wingmen when they were part of the 'Flying Trapeze', the USAAC aerobatic demonstration team. On the left was Luke Williamson and Billy MacDonald, right. Both of them were recruited by China. (USAF)

lead him into a direct collision course with Tokyo.

Meanwhile, Chiang was confronted with additional problems in the far flung Sinkiang Province. The Chinese Turkestan, like Tibet, which were tributaries of the Chinese empire, separated themselves de facto when China plunged into the chaos of the civil war in 1911. The turmoil spread to the Chinese Turkestan with various Turkic tribes revolting against their Chinese overlords. In 1933, the rebels coalesced and funded an Islamic East Turkistan Republic, or Uyghuristan, based in Kashgar in northwestern Sinkiang under Khoja Niyaz.

While fighting was taking place between the various factions, the Soviet Union was fighting an Islamic Turkic insurgency in the Soviet Turkestan. The fear of the Basmachi rebels linking up and seeking refuge in Kashgar, pushed Moscow to directly intervene using the same logic of the first Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in April 1929 to destroy some Basmachi bases.

Furthermore, Tokyo was financing a group of Ottoman, anti-Ataturk refugees led by Prince Abdulkerim, with the aim of creating a puppet state in western Sinkiang. In 1934, officially at the request of the new Sinkiang Military Governor, Sheng Shih Tsai, two brigades of about 7,000 troops, supported by artillery, armoured vehicles and aircraft, crossed the Soviet border and entered into Sinkiang.

The Soviet troops, known as the 'Altai Volunteers', ironically posed as White Russian mercenaries serving with the local Chinese warlord. Their advance was supported by R-5 light bombers that attacked Chinese forces who remained loyal to the Chinese government. It was reported that the Soviet aircraft used mustard gas bombs.

Despite some fierce combat, Chiang Kai Shek backed down and avoided escalation with Moscow. The Soviets bolstered the power of Sheng Shih Tsai, who remained nominally under Chinese jurisdiction but was closely cooperating with the Soviets. A Soviet advisory mission was attached to Sheng while a local air arm was raised. Initially it was completely manned by Soviet personnel and helped to subdue the last Islamic rebels.

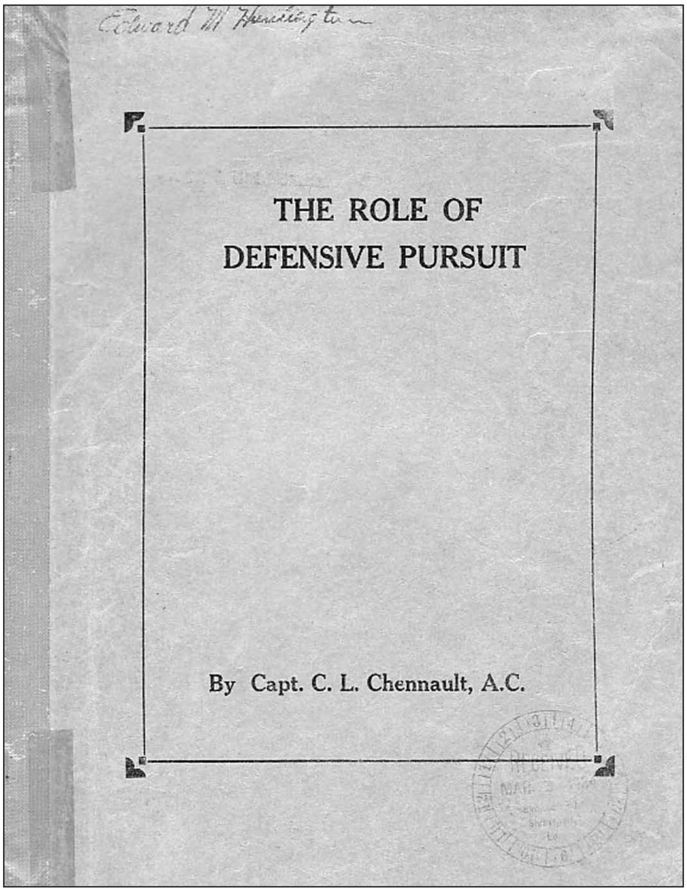
It is within these circumstances that one must approach the role played by Claire Lee Chennault who is at the centrepiece of this story. Officially, he acted individually and went to China on the eve of the Japanese aggression to propose his service as an air advisor to the Chinese Nationalist government. His military career was at stake; he was on the verge of being discharged due to health problems at a rank of captain in regular Army Air Corps (USAAC) and Major in the reserve.

Even if his rank did not indicate his importance, Chennault was serving as an instructor at the prestigious Air Tactical School at Maxwell Field, Alabama, where they were experimenting with new tactics and doctrines around the use of airpower. This came in an era when the General Headquarters favoured the development of a strong, strategic heavy bomber fleet. This was influenced by the theories of the Italian, General Guilio Douhet and General Billy Mitchell, who postulated that fleets of heavy bombers could quickly put an end to any future conflict by attacking the enemy industries and population centres and that the 'bombers would always pass'.

Chennault was not convinced and wrote a treatise in 1935, 'The Role of the Defensive Pursuit' in outright contradiction to the official doctrine. He believed that good training and by adopting the right tactics – including the 'hit and run' exercises he taught where fighter aircraft attacked from above – they could make a screaming pass through the enemy bomber formations, climb back to altitude and do it again, to fend off the enemy attacking bombers.

In a pre-radar era, Chennault also developed a comprehensive observers' system. This was strung around the target and linked by telephone to a central command post where the enemy bombers' progress could be plotted on a map, enabling the fighter commander to know where and when to intercept. Chennault supported a more balanced force structure, where fighter and ground attack aircraft would operate together with the bombers. A point of view validated later during the Second World War.

Also serving on the Pursuit Development Board, Chennault elaborated the specifications for future fighter aircraft. In 1935, he flew the competing Seversky P-35 and Curtiss P-36. After vigorously contradicting the official doctrine, Chennault was barred from further promotion among all the leading air power proponents. In fact, contrary to what his low rank would suggest, far from being a mundane, unremarkable pilot officer, Chennault was then one of the most brilliant aviation officers in the United States and one of a few important theorists of air power in the 1930s. In April 1937, at an age of 44, Chennault was discharged from service due to health problems with regular bronchitis and the beginning of deafness due to high exposition to motor engines noise while flying. Chennault now contemplated what to do next. He was approached in December 1935 by a CNAF representative, Colonel Mao Pang Chu,



Edward M Huntington

THE ROLE OF
DEFENSIVE PURSUIT

By Capt. C. L. Chennault, A.C.

Chennault's treatise, 'The Role of Defensive Pursuit', published in 1935, was in outright contradiction to the official USAAC doctrine in use. This would bar him from further promotions and ultimately, led to his discharge from service. (Malcolm Rosholt Collection)

who was touring the United States with William D. Pauley to recruit American pilots. They had succeeded in hiring the two other pilots who flew with Chennault, forming the official USAAC aerobatic team (the 'Flying Trapeze') and who went to China in July 1936.

Chennault finally accepted a new CNAF offer. Roy Holbrook, an advisor to the Central Trust Company of China brought him to the attention of Madame Chiang Kai Shek, now at the head of the Aeronautical Commission. On Holbrook's recommendation, she persuaded Chennault to accept a position as air defence advisor at a salary of $1,000 a month, three times his last salary in the US military. To avoid a violation of American neutrality statutes, technically his employer was the Bank of China rather than the CNAF and his passport listed his occupation as a farmer.

Chennault held a position roughly equal to those occupied by Jouett and Reinburg. The contract was for a three-month mission to China to make a confidential survey of the Chinese Air Force. Chennault reached China in June 1937 and was warmly received by Madame Chiang. He was deeply impressed by her beauty, intelligence and charisma. Thus, for Chennault, a long association began, through her, with the cause of Nationalist China. Contrary to the other foreign advisors, Chennault also quickly grasped the complexity of the Chinese political scene, where direct personal contacts were more important than official ones. He was also extremely comfortable with the Chinese culture; a trait well appreciated by his Chinese counterparts who too often had to suffer from racial superiority expressed by their Western advisors.

The clashes between the Chinese and Japanese forces on 7 July1937, at the Marco Polo Bridge near Peiping (Beiping) erupted into a full-scale military conflict. Although Nanjing sued for local settlement and was prepared to make concessions, Japan took advantage of the occasion as an excuse for sending heavy reinforcements to North China, occupying Peiping (Beiping) in 20 days.

Claire Lee Chennault in China, acting as de facto the CNAF Chief of Staff and aviation advisor to Chiang Kai Shek. He wears some sort of military uniform but was officially a foreign civilian under contract with the Chinese government. (Jean Holder Collection)

On the eve of the conflict, the US influence was still the greatest within the CNAF. Most of its aircraft were American-built machines and many of its pilots had been trained by American advisors on US tactics. Since the merger of the various regional air forces in 1936, the CNAF now deployed 692 aircraft against 1,530 Japanese Army and Navy aircraft. Some 440 aircraft in service with the Chinese were of American origin. Out of this total, only 284 were modern combat aircraft and Chennault's survey revealed that only 200 of them were readily available for operations, with only 91 deployed in central China to protect Shanghai and Nanking.

The level of training, pilot proficiency and maintenance varied widely, particularly among the former regional aviation units. Practically all the squadron and group commanders had received their training in the Central Aviation School. Chennault also stressed that there were not enough combat planes to provide the reserves needed for continuous operations, so the number of squadrons was reduced from 31 to 21. Nine groups were formed by joining two to three squadrons of the same tactical mission.

While Chennault was inspecting the CNAF bases, the Japanese launched another attack on Shanghai on 13 August, which made war inevitable. Caught in a real war, Chennault immediately took sides and offered his services for an operational role. He was assigned to command the Nanchang advanced flying school and take charge of the final training before being handed the command of the Chinese air operations during the battle of Shanghai.

On 1 September, Chiang Kai Shek brought Chennault to the capital and put him in charge of the CNAF training and operations, making him a de facto Chief of Staff for Air. Despite his new responsibility, Chennault sometimes accompanied the Chinese air strikes by flying a Curtiss Hawk 75H fighter to observe and then refined the tactics he was elaborating. The war in China allowed

Chennault was often accompanying CNAF air strikes against Japanese positions by flying the Curtiss H-75H demonstrator that had been bought by the Chinese. Some 30 improved Curtiss H-75Ms were acquired in 1938. (Wings of China)

In addition to coordinating the CNAF air operations, Chennault spared no efforts to muster support from United States and European countries for China. He was constantly seeking new aircraft. Chennault seen here, first from left in civilian clothes, in front of a Ju-52 from Eurasia, a Sino German airline that continued to fly services to Hong Kong and Hanoi. (Jean Holder Collection)

Chennault to put his ideas to the test in reality. For example, he developed an elaborate air warning system of ground observers linked by telephone and radio to a central command post for the protection of Nanking.

However, after a suicidal heroic fight and suffering tremendous losses, with over 270,000 men killed against 40,000 Japanese, the Chinese forces retreated towards Nanking but could not save the capital. The 'rape of Nanking' that ensued, witnessed an orgy of rapes and murders by the Japanese and at least over 100,000 Chinese were killed.

By December 1937, Chiang Kai Shek evacuated its government to Wuhan first and after the fall of the city in October 1938, to the southwestern city of Chongqing (Chunking), 1,000 miles up the Yangtze River from Nanking (Nanjing). The CNAF, under Chennault leadership, had fought well but had been severely mauled. From July to December 1937, the CNAF had carried out 137 offensive operations and engaged in 57 air battles, claiming 94 Japanese aircraft shot down and 52 more on the ground, against an official figure of 131 aircraft lost.

The war in China rang alarm bells in Washington. The White House was determined to stem the Japanese expansion but had to act tactfully with a strong isolationist party, particularly active within the State Department. Initially, it issued a directive calling for the return of all the American advisors serving in China or threatening either deportation or the abrogation of their nationality. Chennault disregarded the legal consequences and was fully committed to the defence of the Chinese. He even asked (to no avail) for some American instructors to go to bomb Japan on CNAF Martin 139 bombers.

Tokyo took the pretext of American airmen involved in the conflict to accuse the United States of pursuing a hostile policy towards Japan. When an American ship, the SS *Wichita*, began nearing the Chinese coasts with onboard a loading of 19 Bellanca high speed bombers for the CNAF, the Japanese threatened to seize it, before imposing a sea blockade of China.

President Roosevelt finally arranged a compromise between the isolationists and the China lobby supporters, by proclaiming an arms embargo on both belligerents. However, as Japan had not officially declared war on China, Washington would not feel bound by a strict imposition of the embargo. If US arms transited through a third territory, they could continue to be delivered to the Chinese. A great part of them were then rerouted to Hong Kong and to the port of Haiphong, French Indochina, then brought into China by trains. The British also agreed that the Chinese build a motorable road in northeastern Burma for the same purpose.

Meanwhile, Chennault tried desperately to acquire more aircraft and equipment for the CNAF, as well as recruiting more American volunteers. He initially dispatched Russel L. Hearn, a former USAAC officer, to Los Angeles to recruit some 182 pilots and 364 technicians. However, the State Department immediately stopped the scheme and threatened to sue in court, any Americans involved – including Chennault –but any legal pursuits were dropped after a direct intervention of the White House.

On 12 December1937, tension with Japan reached a new height when Japanese aircraft sank the US gunboat *Panay* on the Yangtze River with diplomatic American personnel on board. This only hardened the stance of the White House which patiently elaborated a Japan containment policy in the coming months. Not only was Chennault left to continue his fighting on the side of the Chinese, but Washington found in him – as events would show –the main asset the Americans had for their strategy of confrontation with the Japanese.

Far from being a lonesome maverick as often portrayed until even today, Chennault's actions were comprehensively supported by the American diplomacy, War Department, and Intelligence services. For the remainder of his career, Chennault would be the 'hidden man' of the US parallel diplomacy, involved later in numerous clandestine military operations, in direct contact with the various Intelligence agencies.

4

OPERATION Z

Back in the autumn of 1937, while China desperately sought help from Western powers to support her in its survival fight as a nation, she was rather disappointed by their halfhearted efforts, aggravated by the fact that both Germany and Italy pulled back their advisors and suspended any military equipment deliveries. Only the Soviet Union was ready to offer substantial military aid and an assistance agreement was promptly signed with Moscow at the end of August.

This agreement renewed the old 'revolutionary alliance' that had existed between the KMT and the Soviets. It had been shattered when Chiang Kai Shek turned against his Chinese communist allies but since the 'patriotic reconciliation' of December 1936 between the warring parties to present a unified position against the Japanese threat, Moscow saw no more ideological obstacles to prevent resuming its aid. Despite mutual distrusts, the Soviet aid arrived in due time to save China from a total collapse. Not only was Stalin willing to deliver a great quantity of military equipment but was also ready to send 'volunteer pilots' to fly alongside the CNAF.

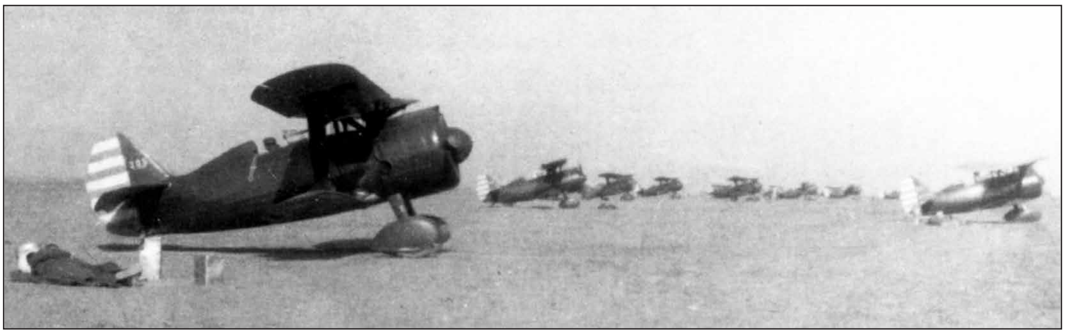
Beginning in November 1937, some 450 Soviet 'volunteers' were assembled in Alma Ata in Soviet Central Asia. They were to bring the first of 225 Soviet aircraft to China. Eventually, replenishments would bring the total to 885 aircraft supplied by 1941, along with vehicles, tanks and artillery, all at very affordable conditions, in exchange for raw Chinese materials like tung oil, wolfram and agriculture products.

Stalin also sent military advisors and military experts. The first group of advisors came to China in November, under the command of General M. I. Dkatwin, officially the Soviet military attaché to Chiang Kai Shek. General Alexander Ivanovich Cherepanov assumed the position of Chiang's military advisor in August 1938 until August 1939. General K. M. Kachanov served in China in the same capacity from September 1939 to February 1941. He was followed by General B. I. Chuikov until he was recalled a year later when American General Joseph Stilwell replaced him as Chiang's top foreign advisors.

The first aircraft were ferried by air across the Tien Shan Mountains and the Taklamakan and Gobi deserts in a dangerous 2,400km long trip. However, most of the supplies were trucked into China over the old 'silk road', across the Sinkiang (Xinjiang) region, to the end of the Chinese railway line at Lanchow (Lanzhou). The Soviets also established aviation schools in Sinkiang and Sichuan provinces and turned Lanchow into a large maintenance centre for Soviet-built aircraft.

The Soviets delivered 93 I-15bis and 62 I-16 fighters and 62 SB bombers in the 1937 supply, enough for three CNAF and two Soviet fighter groups and a CNAF and a Soviet bomber group. The Soviet 'volunteers' were experienced, regular air force units commanded by their own officers, including political commissars. Many were, in

A group of Soviet 'volunteer pilots' awaited at the Lanchow airbase, in early 1938, before being posted to various squadrons further south to help the Chinese airmen to stem the tide of the Japanese advance. Note the TB-3 heavy bomber in the background, some of the few that equipped the CNAF 19th Squadron. (Albert Grandolini Collection)



The CNAF reequipped its decimated units with Soviet aircraft. Most of the fighter units received Polikarpov I-15Bis, illustrated here, that equipped two fighter groups. Some 76 additional I-153s were delivered in 1941. (Wings of China)

Crews of the CNAF 2nd Bombardment Group preparing to board their SB bombers for another sortie in 1939. (Wings of China)

fact, prepared to be deployed to Spain but were redirected to China at the last moment.

The Soviet air contingent was commanded by General Pavel Rychagov who dealt directly with the CNAF CinC, General Mao Pang Chu (Mao Bangchu). Right from the beginning, while still acting as the Chinese Air Force Chief of Staff, Chennault was sidetracked as the Soviets did not want to cooperate with Western advisors. By that time, the Soviets supported most of the fighting.

The defiance towards the Western advisors resulted in those Soviet officers being given pseudonyms when they had to deal with them. General Rychagov was known to Chennault as General 'Asanov' in the rare instances when he had to work with him.

A first group of I-16 fighters, under the command of Major Prokoviev, was immediately thrown into the battle, defending Nanking, the capital of China until its fall on 13 December. Chennault was impressed by their ability and exceptional discipline.

5

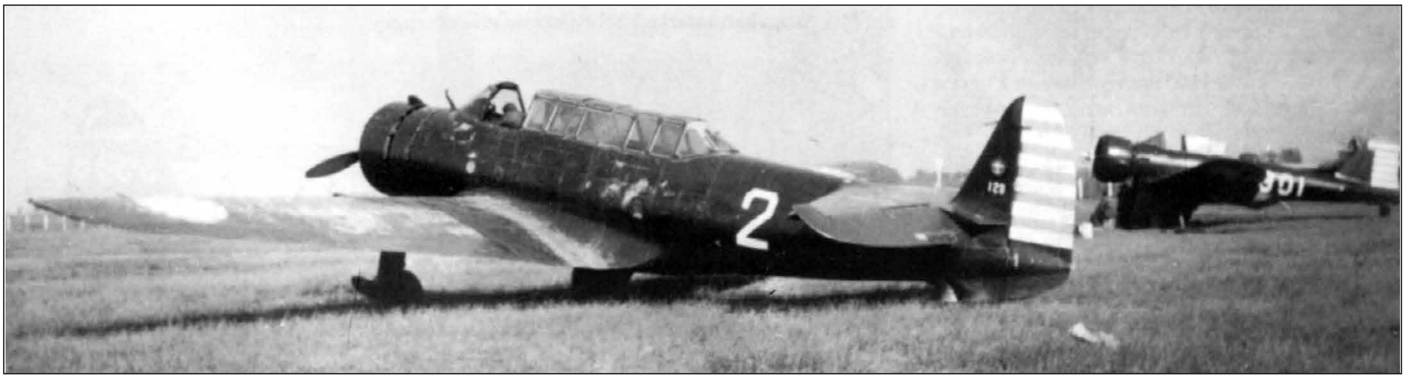
CHENNAULT'S FIRST VOLUNTEER SQUADRON

Chennault made regular reports to US Intelligence about the developments in China. For example, he indicated in the spring of 1938, that the Soviets used their I-16s in 'hit and run' tactics against the nimbler Japanese fighters, the same tactic he advocated when teaching at the Air Tactical School at Maxwell Field. Madame Chiang continued to support Chennault and asked him in November 1937, to raise the 14th Foreign Squadron, made up of Western foreign volunteers, to counterbalance the Soviet influence.

Despite the State Department threat of prosecuting Americans going to fight as mercenaries in China, Chennault succeeded in recruiting at least 13 Americans, four French and one Dutch, to constitute the unit. Some of them had already fought in Spain and they were reinforced by 26 Chinese air gunners, bombardiers and mechanics. The squadron was commanded by the American, Vincent Schmidt and was trained to operate Vultee V-11 and Northrop 2E light bombers. The build-up was rather slow due to a delay in the deliveries of the aircraft and the fact that Chennault insisted that the crews were perfectly trained on ground attack missions before engaging the unit in combat.

Based at Hankow, the unit was declared operational on 23 January 1938. The Japanese bombers raided the base several times in early February, destroying some of its aircraft on the ground. The 14th Foreign Squadron, with the addition of a small number of Martin 139 bombers, continued its operations with a series of

Unidentified Americans studying application forms to join Chennault's raised 14th Foreign Squadron at the end of 1937. Some of them had already fought in Spain with the Republicans. (Malcolm Rosholt Collection)



The 14th Foreign Squadron operated a mix of Vultee V-11 and Northrop 2E light bombers. The CNAF acquired some 30 of the former and 49 of the latter. Both types are illustrated here, with the Vultee V-11G being in the foreground (Malcolm Rosholt Collection)

Despite massive Soviet deliveries of military equipment, Chiang Kai Shek continued to purchase aircraft from Western countries. Chennault, left, was speaking to William C. MacDonald, who had served with the 14th Foreign Squadron, beside one the 30 Curtiss H-75Ms acquired by the CNAF in 1938. (Malcolm Rosholt Collection)

attacks against the Japanese concentration of troops, airfields and railway stations along the Yangtze River.

Most of the missions were flown without fighter escort due to a lack of coordination with the CNAF and total non-cooperation with the Soviets. However, the results from the unit were disappointing, with cases of indiscipline and some pilots resigning. The short-lived unit was deactivated on 22 March, its men dispersed among the Chinese squadrons. The squadron never had sufficient strength to influence the course of events. Chennault was stern in his judgement about its pilots, perhaps to absolve himself from the failure of raising a unit staffed by military detached from the USAAC.

In fact, he saw examples of how units entirely equipped and manned by foreign pilots could weigh on the course of the air battle against the Japanese. The Soviet squadrons raided the Japanese airfields throughout central China and even attacked an airbase in Formosa (Taiwan). Obsessed, Chennault consistently advocated that, 'all the Chinese need were 100 American volunteer pilots and 100 modern fighters' to turn the tide of the war. The time was yet to come.

Always trying to counterbalance his awkward alliance with the Soviets, Chiang Kai Shek continued to order Western aircraft at a high price. Some 120 aircraft were procured in 1938, including 36 Gloster Gladiators, 30 Hawk 75Ms, and 24 Dewoitine D.510Cs. Interestingly, and hoping for firmer French support in their struggle against the Japanese, the Chinese decided to raise, in July 1938, the 41st French Squadron on D.510Cs, the remaining aircraft of the French order were to form the CNAF 42nd Squadron.

The unit was commanded by William Labussière, a former French Air Force officer who had previously fought in Spain and served with the 14th Foreign Squadron. He was placed under a French military aviation advisory mission under the command of French Air Force General Berger. The unit had a short-lived existence when Paris backed down, whilst the Japanese forces now began to occupy southern China, moving towards the French Indochina border.

The unit was disbanded and the French pilots were dispersed as instructors among the CNAF units. William Labussière nevertheless, retained an air defence flight of D.510Cs with the CNAF Central School. He would continue to have an eventful pilot career during the Second World War and afterward in various parts of the world, including with the Syrian Air Force during the first Arab-Israeli War.

Now, with the Soviet's role being prominent, the days of Chennault acting as the CNAF Chief of Staff were numbered. He did, however, have time to reorganise the service into three regions, called Air Route Commands, with squadrons moving from one to another as needed. The First Air Route Command, with headquarters in Nanchang, covered provinces in central China and tried to stop the Japanese thrust towards Wuhan. The Second Air Route Command at Canton (Guangzhou), included the southern provinces, while the Third, at Sian (Xian), protected the 'Red route' of Soviet supplies through northwestern provinces.

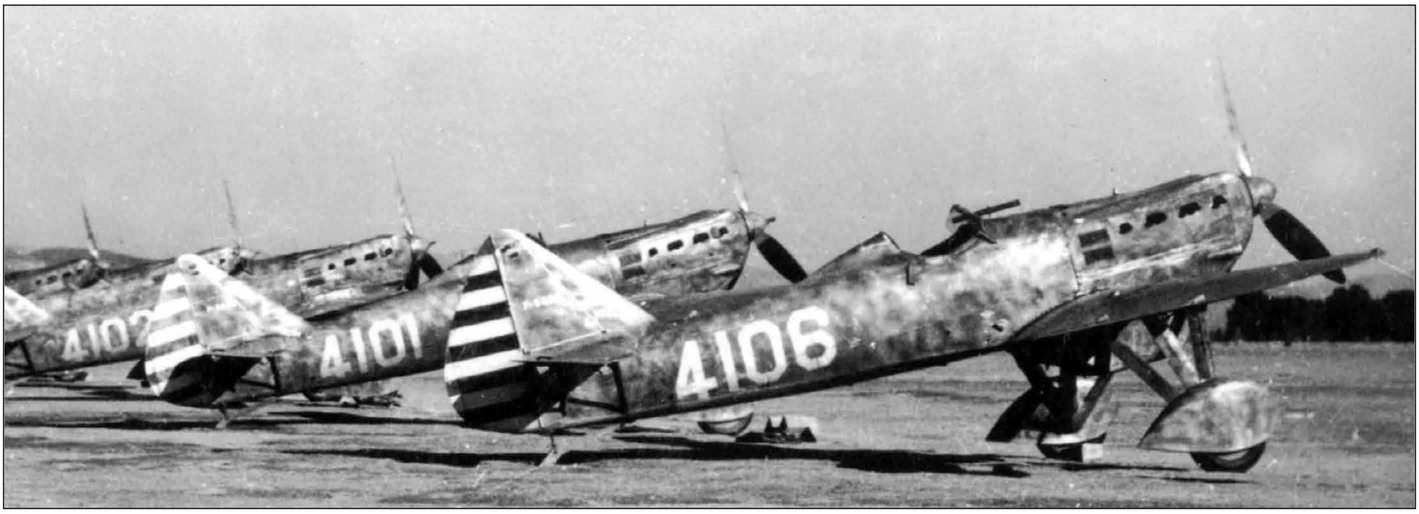
By the end of October 1938, the fall of Wuhan, Canton and Hankow (Hankou) ended the first phase of the Sino-Japanese war. Despite the Soviet aid, the Japanese still had the upper hand in the air war. From August 1937 to October 1938, they claimed no less than 617 enemy planes shot down. On their side, the Chinese claimed 227 Japanese aircraft whilst admitting 202 aircraft lost.

During these 15 months, the CNAF fought desperately to provide air cover for the huge exodus of tens of millions of Chinese following their government into the deep interior of the country. This included soldiers, the urban middle class of the coastal cities, 40,000 university students and 400 dismantled factories.

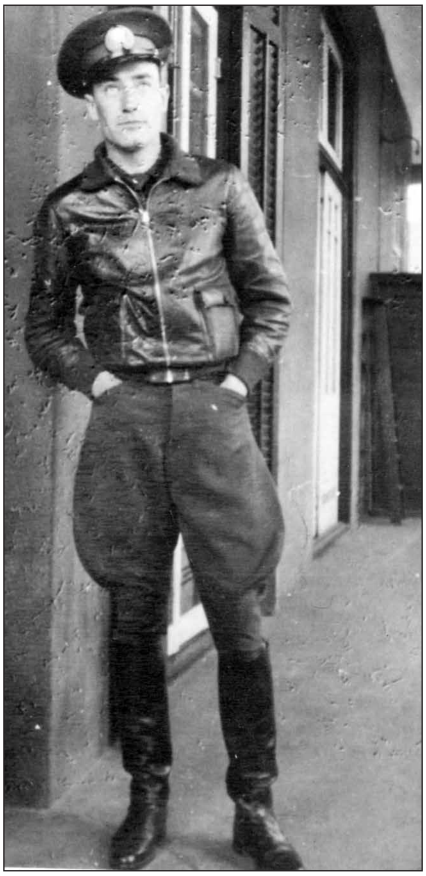
Among the industries following Chiang Kai Shek to the west was CAMCO; William D. Pawley loaded his machine tools and Hawk 75Ms assemblies onto flatcars and sent them down to Hong Kong and from there, to Rangoon, Burma. It then travelled by barge and rail to Lashio and by truck and elephant back to Loiwing, just across the Chinese border in Yunnan Province. There, another CAMCO factory financed by China and employing 6,000 workers was re-built and partly owned by William D. Pawley.

The Shaoguan Aircraft Factory was also evacuated to Hengyang (Henyang) and was taken over by the Consolidated Trading Company, representing Chance-Vought, North American, Ryan and Seversky companies.

Disorganised by constantly changing its operating bases, by December 1938 the CNAF was down to only 174 planes. Most of



The Chinese purchased some 24 Dewoitine D.510Cs. Shortly after being impounded in Indochina by local French authorities who wanted to press them into service for the defence of the colony, they were finally released to their owners. They served to raise in July 1938, the short-lived 41st French Squadron. (Malcolm Rosholt Collection)



The image shows William Labussière, who commanded the 41st French Squadron. He was a former French Air Force officer who had fought in Spain and previously served with the 14th Foreign Squadron. He reintegrated the French Air Force in Indochina during the Second World War and saw combat actions against the Japanese and the Thai. He pursued an eventful aviation career, thereafter, serving as advisor to the nascent Syrian Air Force during the first Arab-Israeli War of 1948–1949. (Malcolm Rosholt Collection)

the squadrons had pulled back to Szechuan (Sichuan) province in the west and Kwangsi in the south whilst a new capital was set up at Chungking (Chongqing). Route Commands had also retreated, the First to Hengyang, the Second to Liuchow (Liuzhou), and the Third to Nancheng County.

Under the pretext that he had been unable to defend Hankow, Chennault was removed from his post of the CNAF Chief of Staff at the end of 1938. However, the Chinese still valued his professionalism, as well as his loyalism, as he stood by their side although the country appeared to be collapsing.

Abandoning Nanking, the Chinese moved the seat of their government to Chungking, some 1,400km away along the Yangtze River. The new capital was protected against Japanese air raids by a ring of observation posts established by Chennault. These posts are being shown on a map in 1938 by Chinese officers. (Malcolm Rosholt Collection)

He was sent west to the province of Yunnan, bordering the British colony of Burma, to relocate the CNAF training apparatus. He decided to set up a cluster of three schools located around the mountainous town of Kunming. This was linked by rails to Hanoi, French Indochina and was soon to be connected to Lashio in Burma when hundreds of thousands Chinese labourers would enlarge an ancient mountainous mule track into a road fit for motoring.

Chennault's new position was Chief Flying Instructor. He established a primary flight school at Yunnan-yi, 100 miles west of Kunming on the road to Burma; an intermediate school at Mengzi, on the Indochina border; and an advanced school at Wu Chia Ba airport, seven miles outside Kunming. The schools used several foreigners as instructors, including 18 American pilots under the command of Billy McDonald, one of the former pilots of the 'Flying Trapeze' aerobatic team serving with Chennault. They were supplemented by 42 Chinese instructors.

China's government had refused to capitulate whilst the overextended Japanese forces could not advance further west, after occupying nearly all the major seaports, commercial cities, and railway junctions. The weakened Chinese Army could not counter-attack but was large enough and determined enough to make further land-grabbing too costly for Japan.

The second phase of the War of Resistance (as the Chinese called it) started with a strategic bombing campaign against the Chinese cities in the interior which began in earnest by the spring of 1939. Chennault was asked to develop an air warning organisation, with several layers of observers reporting to centralised control posts to coordinate the air defence efforts.

It had also become urgent to reinforce the CNAF. With the war clouds accumulating over Europe, Chiang Kai Shek rightly guessed that Stalin would soon stop his support in order to regroup his forces for the impending conflict in Europe. Testing the ground, Chungking asked Washington for aircraft procurements and the hiring of 'pilots serving as instructors'. Once again, the Americans eluded that last point but were willing to sell aircraft. Chennault was back in the picture and was consulted at length about the deal.

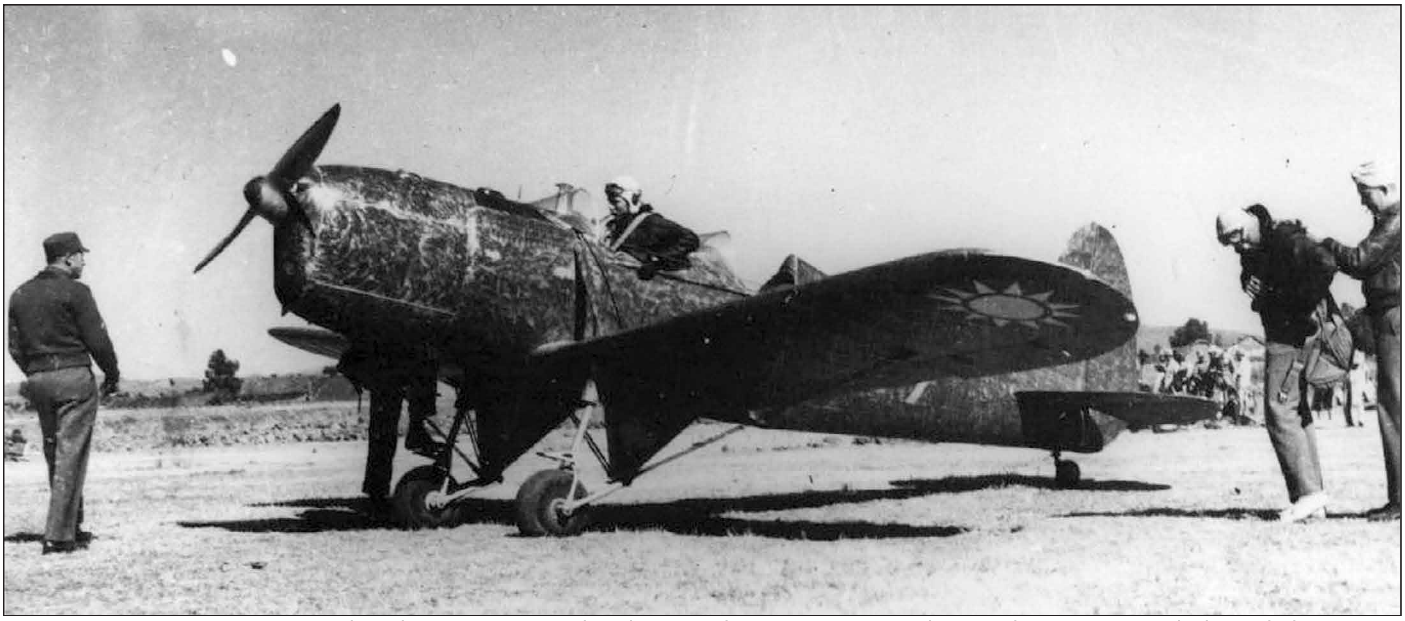
After extensive negotiations, notably about financial issues, in February 1939 the Chinese government placed an order and the biggest contract ever was awarded – some $12.8 million for assembling American aircraft under licence. Tokyo protested and recalled that practically all exports of American aircraft to Japan had ceased in the meantime. The contract had to be shared between the CAMCO and the Consolidated Trading Company installed at Hengyang.

The Chinese ordered 55 Curtiss P-36 Mohawks, 75 Vultee V-12 attack planes and 33 CW-21 Demon interceptors from CAMCO. The contract with the Consolidated Trading Company was for 120 Ryan and North American trainers, 25 Vought Vindicator dive-bombers and 54 Seversky P-35 fighters. All seemed very encouraging when infighting between American companies derailed the transaction. The ambitious William D. Pawley questioned the validity of the prices for some aircraft to be assembled by the Consolidated Trading Company and lobbied through his friends in the Chinese government and military that the P-36 assembled by the CAMCO was far superior to the P-35.

Whilst part of the trainers arrived in Rangoon, they were impounded whilst waiting for the settlement of the legal issue. Finally

CAMCO staff at Loiwing in 1939. William D. Pawley, second from left, was posing with his two associated brothers, Ed Pawley, third from right and Gene Pawley, in the centre of the photo. William D. Pawley would serve as the official recruiting company when Chennault set up his AVG in 1941. Forced to abandon his Loiwing plant due to Japanese bombing, William D. Pawley moved to India and founded the Hindustan Aircraft Limited Company in Bangalore. (Malcolm Rosholt Collection)

Claire Lee Chennault, second from right, seen here at Kunming's Wu Chia Ba airbase in 1939 with a group of US instructors. As the CNAF Chief Flying Instructor, he was in charge of the training effort to reconstitute the decimated squadrons with newly graduated pilots and technicians. (Jean Holder Collection)



An American instructor preparing to board a Ryan STM-2E with a Chinese cadet at Kunming's Wu Chia Ba airbase in 1940. (Malcolm Rosholt Collection)

in August, the Chinese cancelled the contract with the Consolidated Trading Company. However, part of the aircraft to be assembled within this contract would be handed over to the CAMCO. The purchase of the P-35s was abrogated, which resulted in Seversky becoming bankrupt. Not only had the CNAF seen the acquisition of new equipment delayed but the assembly of the airframes at the CAMCO started only in June 1940.

On 26 October, 59 Japanese bombers virtually demolished the factory at Loiwing. Dozens of half-completed CW-21s and Vultee V-12s were destroyed. Pawley salvaged what remained of the machinery and assemblies and shipped them to Bangalore in India, where he reconstituted himself as Hindustan Aircraft Ltd., building planes for the Royal Air Force. The Loiwing factory was re-built as a maintenance and repair facility for the CNAF. The Chinese had to be content with importing aircraft directly rather than assembling them locally. Despite all the setbacks, the United States sold some 279 aircraft during the period 1938–1940 to China.

In November 1939, after the outbreak of the Second World War, the Soviet 'volunteer' units began leaving China. Captain Kozachenko was made Hero of the Soviet Union for his 11 claimed kills, flying his I-16 fighter. Some 2,000 Soviet pilots had fought in China since 1937 and 200 of them were killed. Most of them rested in a cemetery in Nanchang. Sadly, in 1967, during the Cultural Revolution, the Red Guards destroyed their tombs. Without the support of Soviet units and with the CNAF down to only 150 aircraft, Chiang Kai Shek urgently needed a new means to counter the Japanese air superiority.

The Japanese Navy had just introduced a new fighter, the famed Mitsubishi A6M Zero that quickly dominated the sky over Chungking (Chongqing). Chennault sent alarming, detailed reports to the US military attaché about this new threat, insisting on its performances in agility, firepower and particularly its impressive range. In fact, right from the start, Chennault had regularly been in touch with American military Intelligence, filling reports about the developments in China along with the new equipment introduced into this theatre, whether Soviet or Japanese. His past experience with the Pursuit Development Board of the USAAC served him well as he presided on the calibrated evaluation tests opposing the Gloster Gladiator to the I-15Bis and I-16 and the same Soviet designs to the Curtiss Hawk-75Q, the export version of the retractable landing gear P-36.

Most of his reports were overlooked by the top American commanders who did not want to believe that the Japanese were able to develop such kind of high performance aircraft. Everyone was convinced that the Japanese could only build inferior copies of Western machines. This belief would have tragic consequences for Allied airmen during the first months after Pearl Harbor.

The Chinese capital was now subjected to an intense bombardment campaign. By Chinese count, the Japanese had flown 14,138 bombing sorties during 1939 causing 28,463 deaths. From August to December, the CNAF flew only 756 sorties, lost 35 aircraft and 13 pilots and could claim only 17 victories. During 1940, the Japanese flew 12,767 bombing sorties, killing 18,829. The CNAF claimed 27 victories but could not conceal that China had lost the air war.

6

CONTAINING JAPAN

In order to win over America's support, Chiang Kai Shek based his argumentation around the following themes: how long could China keep on fighting with her cities unprotected from Japanese bombings, and in case China capitulated, what would become of British and American interests in Asia?

In December 1939, he asked William D. Pawley to go to Washington for a new exploratory mission to scout the possibilities of hiring American pilots to replace the departing Soviets. The presentation was made by Captain Bruce Leighton, formerly US Navy but now vice president of Pawley's personal holding company, Intercontinent. Received by Admiral Harold Stark, the Chief of Naval operations, he requested for the CNAF 100 fighters and 100 bombers that could be operated by 50 American pilots, to be supplemented by the cadets Chennault had trained in Kunming. The cost would be $25 million, which China would borrow from American banks. Although arousing interests, Washington again eluded the proposal.

During that spring, western Europe was conquered by Germany in a stunning lightning campaign. Only Great Britain stood alone facing Hitler. With patience and guile, President Roosevelt began to manoeuvre the United States into the position of supporting the British. Chiang Kai Shek quickly took advantage of the new thinking and sent his Minister of Finance and brother-in-law, Tse-ven Soong (T.V. Soong to his friends) to again plead the cause of China.

On 9 July 1940, he met the US Treasury Secretary, Henry Morgenthau. The Chinese requested that the United States lend China $140 million to stabilise her currency, improve the Burma Road and buy military supplies, including 300 fighter planes and 100 light bombers. The Pawley-Leighton proposal had been doubled in size.

T.V. Soong also cultivated the China lobby in Washington, particularly the members of Roosevelt's 'kitchen cabinet' of informal advisors, including Lauchlin Currie, an economist and White House aide, along with Thomas Corcoran. The latter was a prominent lobbyist and nobody else had so many and such useful friendships in government or maintained them so well.

Even though it was expensive, T.V. Soong engaged him to foster the Chinese cause on Capitol Hill, particularly with the Senate in order to secure a loan for China. He was helped by Joseph Alsop, also a member of the 'kitchen cabinet', related to Eleanor Roosevelt and a columnist who published each week in 74 newspapers. Alsop developed an intense pro-China press campaign.

In September, as the Chinese delegation was negotiating through the intricacies of Washington's political scene, the Japanese forced the new French Vichy's government to authorise them to base troops in northern Indochina. This led Washington to impose economic embargo on Japan. Tokyo retaliated on 27 September by signing the Tripartite Pact with Berlin and Rome.

Soon, the Japanese bombers operating from Hanoi began to attack the CNAF training bases around Kunming. Eyewitnesses reported that a sombre Chennault did not take cover during these raids, standing outside to study the Japanese formations, taking notes like a 'football coach studies film of a team he expects soon to meet in the field'.

In Washington, T.V. Soong and Bruce Leighton continued to win over more people to the Chinese cause and began negotiating for the very heart of their programme – the acquisition of aircraft and the setting up of an 'American air legion'. They asked for General Mao Pan-chu (Mao Bangchu) of the Aeronautical Commission to come to Washington as an expert. T.V. Soong also proposed that Chennault should join them, believing that he would be the right man to convince the Americans. Before boarding a Pam Am Clipper flying boat at Hong Kong, Chennault was received at length by Chiang Kai Shek who reminded him the importance of his mission; that China needed, in utmost urgency, a special air unit of 500 American warplanes and pilots.

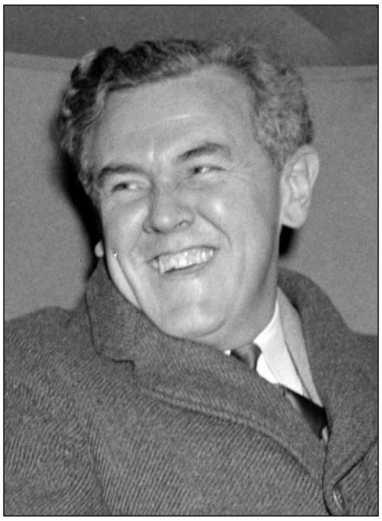
Chennault arrived in Washington at the end of October 1940 and was received by T.V. Soong and Arthur Young, the American financial advisor to Chiang's government. They prepared a detailed request for 250 air-cooled engine fighters, plus 100 fighters with liquid-cooled engines, 150 bombers, 10 transports and 190 training planes, plus parts, gasoline, anti-aircraft guns and materials to build airfields and landing strips. The plan also called for '350 flight instructors and technicians' to be recruited by Pawley.

Chennault was accompanied in his trip to the United States by the Chinese Minister of Finance and Chiang Kai Shek's brother-in-law, Tse-ven Soong (T.V. Soong). A Harvard University graduate, he would tell his numerous contacts he was there as the personal representative of Chiang. He stayed most of the Second World War in USA as China foreign affairs minister in order to foster the alliance between the two countries. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

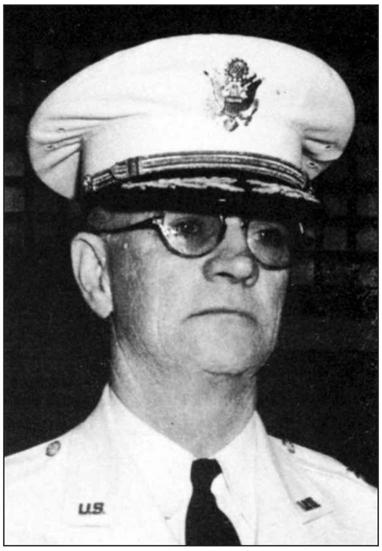
Despite being sidetracked by the massive Soviet military mission in China at the end of 1938, Chennault still retained the confidence of Chiang Kai Shek and his wife, with whom he had developed personal ties that would endure until the end of his life. In October 1940, Chiang sent him to Washington as the CNAF technical representative to negotiate the purchase of further aircraft and the raising up of an AVG. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Marking a radical departure from the previous policy, Washington outrightly supported China in its struggle against Japan by granting a first loan of $100 million on 29 November 1940. This was further increased on 6 May 1941, with China now eligible for the new Lend-Lease Act. The decision to grant the loan is shown being discussed with the House Military Affairs Committee, with the Secretary of State Dean Acheson, first from left, presenting the details to the members of the committee. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

The Clagett inspection led to the creation of the American Military Mission to China (AMISSCA), under Brigadier General John Magruder in July 1941. This was the first time that such a high level US official mission was earmarked for China despite strong Japanese protests. Magruder seen here whilst he was the military attaché in China in early 1930s. (USAF)



T.V. Soong engaged the very influential lobbyist Thomas Corcoran (shown) to secure loans and weapons from the United States. Both co-founded the China Defense Supplies Company, located in the Chinese Embassy, to handle purchasing which included aircraft for the future AVG. (Albert Grandolini Collection)



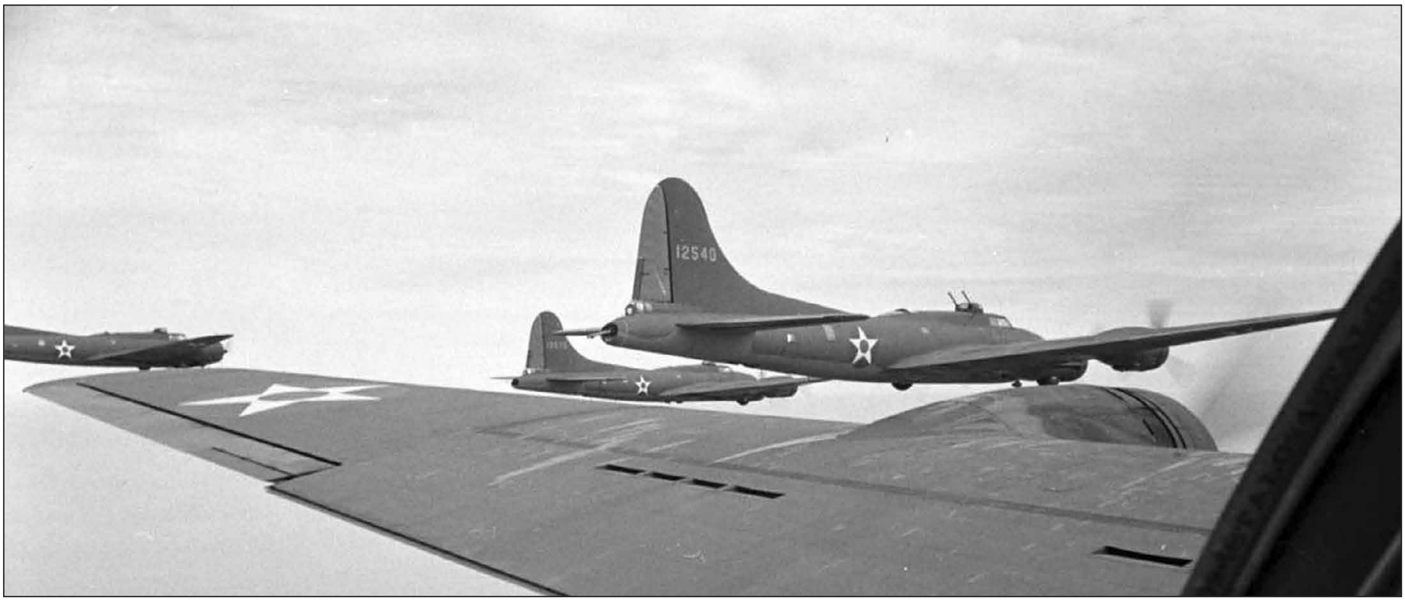
In June 1941, Washington sent an official inspection team to China, under General Henry B. Clagett to assess the re-equipment needs of the Chinese within the cadre of the Lend-Lease Programme. (USAF)

Chennault also met Corcoran who later recalled that 'if he had left in the first ten minutes, I would have written him off as a fanatic'. However, by the end of an hour of discussions, the aviator had convinced the lobbyist and word went back to Roosevelt that they 'had found a promising weapon to use against Japan'. However, Corcoran warned that Chennault must be allowed to run his own show. Their relationship, he said in an analogy that managed to flatter both men, would be 'that of Elisabeth I to Sir Francis Drake'. For Chennault it was a sweet revenge since he was unceremoniously discharged from USAAC three years ago. Roosevelt then ordered Corcoran to introduce Chennault to 'influential men who could keep their mouths shut'.

Roosevelt intervened personally on 29 November, to agree a loan of $100 million from the US treasury to China. Chennault now found his planes in a situation whereby the absolute priority was to furnish the United Kingdom. Pawley contacted his parent company, Curtiss-Wright, who indicated the company was in full production of some 630 Tomahawk fighters for the RAF. However, Curtiss had enough parts left to build a few hundred additional fighters that could keep the Buffalo plant running at full capacity. Thus, China's needs could be met simply by extending the production run.

Meanwhile, during a discussion between T.V. Soong and the Secretary to the Treasury, Henry Morgenthau, the latter suggested that the United States could also add some long-range bombers. Soong was not sure if Morgenthau differentiated between the twin-engines tactical bombers requested by Chennault and the 'long range bombers'. When informed, Chiang Kai Shek immediately requested that the Americans also deliver their jealously guarded strategic B-17 Flying Fortresses that not even the British had been able to procure.

The B-17 issue was studied during a meeting on 19 December between T.V. Soong, Roosevelt and the secretaries of State, Treasury, Army and Navy. They studied a map supplied by Soong showing 136 airfields in southern and eastern China and one just 600 miles from Nagasaki and Sasebo navy bases. Roosevelt was delighted but he



Whilst in Washington, Chennault pressed for the acquisition of Boeing B-17s to attack Japanese cities. The heavy bombers would sport Chinese national markings but would be manned by American 'volunteer crews'. The proposal was discussed at the highest level over several weeks. Finally, President Roosevelt paused the scheme on the eve of the Pearl Harbor attack. (USAF)

wanted to discuss the details with Chennault as the CNAF technical representative.

As no Chinese crews were available, T.V. Soong requested that the bombers could be flown by American pilots who he was willing to pay $1,000 a month. During a discussion held on 21 December, it was agreed that American military crews would fly 12 B-17s to the Philippines, where the pilots and bombardiers would be released from active duty and fly them to China.

Each B-17 would be accompanied by five American mechanics but the CNAF would provide gunners and radiomen. Chennault suggested the planes could be used to attack Japanese cities with incendiary bombs in February or March of the next year, as he said that most of their houses 'were all made of just wood and paper'.

There could be no doubt what under discussion: US planes and US pilots, in the employ of China, should set the Japanese cities on fire. Gone were the days of restraints due to the strong isolationist movement. However, the next day, facing a strong opposition from the Army Chief of Staff, General George Marshall, who wanted to reserve all available Flying Fortresses for their use in Europe in case of necessity rather than ruin them for the Chinese, the B-17 project was scrubbed.

On 1 January 1941, T.V. Soong was informed that for the moment, the United States could only supply 100 Curtiss H81-A3 (P-40C) fighters, partly taken out from a British order. Further aircraft, including tactical bombers, could only be delivered in the second half of the year or in 1942. Operating as an official Chinese purchasing agent, the Universal Trading Corporation on behalf of the Chinese government, reached an agreement on 10 February 1941 with Curtiss-Wright Corporation to the purchase of those 100 fighters.

However, Corcoran wanted a new organisation (under his direct leadership) to handle all the related aid to China, without any legal restrictions that were still in place about weapons exports to foreign countries. Corcoran's company was China Defense Supplies, located in the Chinese Embassy. T.V. Soong was chairman. To be sure to have the full backing of the White House, President Roosevelt's elderly uncle, Frederic Delano, signed on as its 'honorary counsellor' the technical advisor, Claire Lee Chennault. The company also employed several key officials who had direct contact with Congress and the War Department. The USMC dispatched an Intelligence officer as a Liaison officer.

The American diplomats also succeeded in convincing the British to temporarily allow the assembling of the CNAF fighter force in their colony of Burma. The delivered aircraft would be assembled by the CAMCO in Mingaladon, the Rangoon's airport. The final contract was signed in April, when Pawley negotiated his own commission of $250,000. A first shipment of Curtiss H81-A3s was sent from the United States on 19 February 1941 via South Africa and Indian Ocean, a three-month trip.

At the same time, the Chinese also tried to obtain further aids by being eligible to the new Lend-Lease Act, adopted on 11 March, when Congress gave President Roosevelt power to use $7 billion to 'aid any country whose defense deems vital to the United States'. This act signalled a radical departure of US foreign policy and ended American isolationism.

On 6 May, Roosevelt made an important step in the commitment to provide massive government-to-government aid, declaring that China would be eligible for Lend-Lease , including equipment for the 30 Chinese divisions in addition to its air force. Before this, Roosevelt had sent Lauchlin Currie to China to negotiate the deal with Chiang Kai Shek. He had taken with him the 'Short-Term Aircraft Program', drafted by Chennault, for a force of 469 aircraft.

Currie came back at the end of May with the plan accepted by the Chinese but with the still persistent, Chiang Kai Shek request of additional bombers to directly attack Japan. Once again, Chennault pressed his demands for bombing Japan. He directly appealed to the Joint Planning Committee representing the secretaries of war and navy.

For several weeks, top-secret discussions went on. On 12 July, the Joint Board approved the Currie-Chennault programme to promote 'the bombing of Japan' with American aviators and airplanes. Secretary Knox and Acting Secretary of War, Paterson, approved this plan six days later and on 23 July, this was secretly ratified by President Roosevelt. However, the execution of the directive was still on hold, awaiting further developments with the State Department.

In June, Washington had sent an official inspection team to China under General H.B. Clagett to assess their needs. On his return, he recommended that Lend-Lease funds would be immediately allocated for 269 P-43 and P-66 fighters; types available because they were not wanted by the USAAF or the RAF. There were also 33 A-20 Havoc and 33 A-29 Hudson light bombers diverted from a British order. Clagett also recommended sending an official American advisory mission to China, a goal long sought by Chiang Kai Shek.

The American Military Mission to China (AMISSCA), under Brigadier General John Magruder, arrived in Chunking (Chongqing) in July. Later, Magruder joined the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) and continued to support China in this new capacity. He would also play a formative role in the creation of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in 1947.

However, whilst waiting for the American aircraft to be built, the CNAF was still desperately in need of planes to replace its mounting losses. In December 1940 as a last gesture to reinforce China, Stalin decided to deliver a batch of 100 SB and DB-3 bombers and 148 I-153 and I-16 fighters. These aircraft, delivered in early 1941, were the last supplied by the 'Red route', as the Soviet Union now faced a life-or-death struggle in Europe. A neutrality pact was negotiated with Japan in April 1941 and on 22 June, Hitler's invasion of Russia begun. Only the Burma Road remained available for future supplies for China.

7

THE AMERICAN VOLUNTEER GROUP

In the meantime, Chennault was working out the details of setting up his first fighter unit and finding people to fly and maintain the recently acquired P-40Cs (Hawk 81-A3s). Currie took Chennault to see General Hap Arnold at the War Department. Even with a presidential assistant in the room, Arnold would not let his pilots go. He explained that he needed every of them for the tremendous expansion plan of the USAAF for the war that was sure to come. Chennault and Currie fared no better with Rear Admiral John Towers at the Navy's Bureau of Aeronautics.

Thomas Corcoran had better luck behind the scenes. With personal backing of Roosevelt, he met with the Secretaries of War and Navy and promised that Chennault would not pillage any one service but would take a few men from each. The agreement was never more formal than that.

On 15 April 1941, CAMCO – Intercontinent of Pawley, was officially put in charge as personnel recruiter and fiscal agent, tasked with of the creation of three advanced instruction units. The operation of these units in China should be under the immediate direction of an 'American supervisor'. For 'advanced instruction and training unit', read fighter squadron. For 'active trainer', read P-40 and for 'American supervisor', read Claire Lee Chennault.

An unresolved issue was the status of the Americans being sent to fight the Japanese. A year ago, when Leighton and Pawley had mooted the proposal, it appeared there were considerable numbers of American pilots who would be glad to volunteer their services to China. They suggested to the State Department that matters could be handled in the same way as pilots volunteering for service with Great Britain. This would entail discharging the pilots from US service and letting them travel as civilians to a neutral country, such as Canada, where they would join the foreign air force without taking formal oath of allegiance.

However, Corcoran again manoeuvred adroitly and persuaded the State Department to let American pilots go to China as 'instructors'. In April 1941, President Roosevelt orally authorised reserve officers and enlisted men on active duty to change to inactive status, then to re-enlist in the CNAF. However, in part to lure Japanese Intelligence, on their passports they should claim they were businessmen.

The main CAMCO recruiters were Rutledge Irvine in charge of US Navy and USMC pilots, Skip Adair and Richard Aldworth went for the USAAF. The middle rank officers recruited were offered salaries ranging from $600 to $700, two to three times what they earned in the military. There was also a mention of a $500 bounty for each Japanese aircraft shot down. If they were disabled or killed, CAMCO would make a lump-sum payment of six month's salary to him or his estate.

The pilot was also required to take out a $10,000 life insurance policy and the premiums to be deducted from his pay. There was no provision for what would happen if he were taken prisoner. These conditions were not exceptional for the work at hand. Some pilots who flew as mercenaries in Spain earned $1,500 a month plus $1,000 for each enemy plane shot down. The American civilians ferrying bombers to Britain also earned $1,500 a month, with a bonus of $2,500 after 10 successful deliveries.

Despite the White House backing, Chennault still encountered strong resistance from the different services to release their most experienced personnel. Most of them came from the US Navy but not all of them were fighter pilots. There were dive-bomber, transport or flying boat pilots who needed to be retrained for flying the P-40s. Some 99 pilots were recruited as well as 186 technicians. Not all of them came genuinely in defence of China or for American interests but were attracted by the high salaries offered. Others were bored of the peacetime routine and were searching to be employed in real combat operations. Others later confessed that as war with Germany was a growing possibility, they believed it was less risky to fight the 'second rated Japanese'.

On 8 July 1941, the first contingent of recruited pilots and mechanics left San Francisco, on the Java Pacific liner *Jaegersfontein*. After Honolulu, the ship was escorted by two US Navy cruisers in case it would be intercepted by the Japanese Navy. When it reached the Netherlands Indies, the escort was taken over by a Dutch Navy cruiser to Singapore. As the men were still on their way to China, the Wu Chia Ba base in Kunming was drenched with the monsoon rains. Furthermore, the base was now regularly bombed by the Japanese Air Force.

Washington meanwhile had reached an agreement with London for the CNAF 1st AVG to be temporarily based in Kyedaw airfield in northern Burma. China and Great Britain also agreed that, in case of war, Chinese forces could be sent to defend Burma.

Meanwhile, President Roosevelt had further outlined his policy regarding Tokyo. In October 1941, he authorised the setting up of the 2nd AVG, equipped with bombers. The unit was to be equipped with A-20 and A-29 bombers that would later be reinforced by B-25s. The bombers would be sent to attack French Indochina first, then Japanese cities 'with incendiary bombs'.

The first strikes were scheduled for November and early December 1941. Combined with the freezing of Japanese financial

The Flying Tigers and their 'One-off' Fighter

Over the years, the 100 P-40 fighters from the first type used by the AVG, have been diversely described as P-40B, P-40C, Tomahawk IIA, or Tomahawk IIB. However, thanks to the testimonies of former pilots, especially Erik Shilling and the research carried out by author Daniel Ford and others, it is now clear that these fighters were a one-of-a-kind model, mainly due to their urgent need and the situation at the Curtiss-Wright factory.

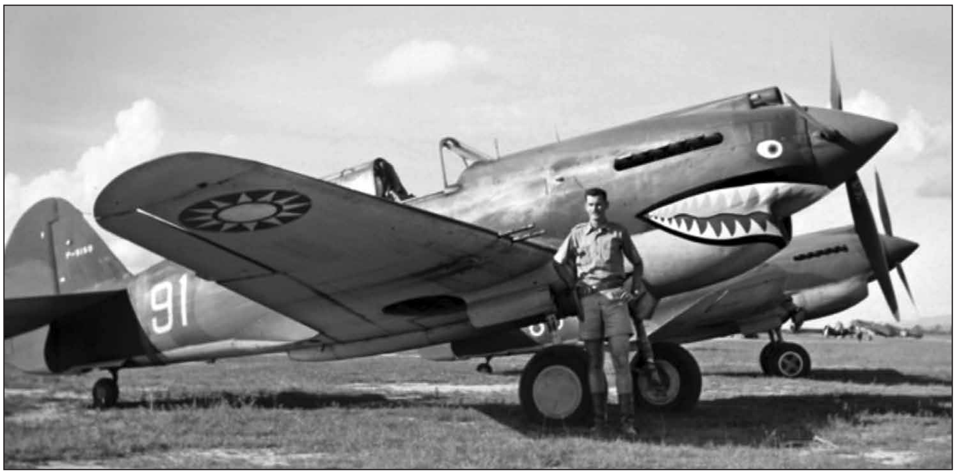
When the decision of a speedy procurement was taken, the planes on the Curtiss plant's assembly lines were part of a British order for Tomahawk IIB, a model designated H81-A2 by Curtiss-Wright. These uncompleted aircraft had already been attributed RAF serial numbers. They were basically similar to the US Army P-40C type. The RAF agreed to trade 100 of these earlier models for future P-40Ds, which they named Kittyhawk.

With the selected airplanes only in various stages of completion, Curtiss-Wright saw the opportunity to make good use of the already produced elements that had been rejected by the RAF. The latter had not accepted the externally sealed fuel tanks previously fitted to the P-40B, requesting instead internal tank sealing for their new Tomahawk fighters. Consequently, Curtiss-Wright management decided to fit the available externally sealed fuel tanks to the AVG planes. Moreover, because the contract with China did not require provision for an external fuel tank, all the related fittings were omitted. The resulting model was considered as a new type by Curtiss-Wright and assigned the designation H81-A3.

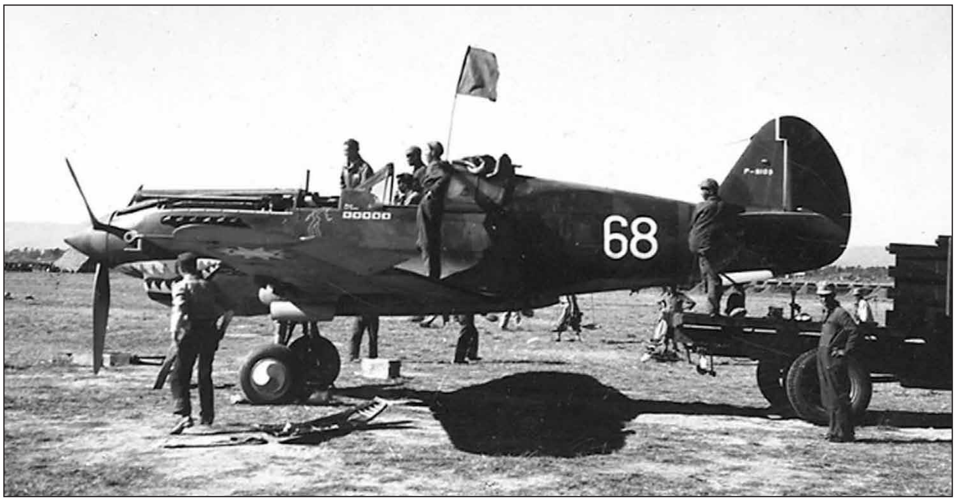
As the planes were needed urgently, Curtiss-Wright could not wait for Allison to manufacture new V-1710 engines. Since no spare engines were available at the factory, Allison decided to fall back on their stockpile of engine parts that had failed quality control standards. A new production line was created in order to re-tool the rejected parts and then match them and assemble them into engines with tight tolerances. As a result, these re-built engines proved to be more powerful on average than the usual engines.

In order to service the Allison engines in theatre, CAMCO decided to hire a small group of Chinese American technicians, either immigrants or US-born and have them trained at the Allison factory in Indianapolis, where additional engines ordered as spares were being assembled. Eventually nine technicians passed selection and they travelled to Burma together with the last batch of AVG volunteer pilots, arriving in November 1941.

The planes were shipped to Burma in three batches which arrived at Rangoon in May, June, and July 1941, respectively. They were re-assembled at the Mingaladon airport. They still had no armament, no gunsights and no radio equipment. All this was procured and fitted locally. While the nose machine guns were of the usual .50 calibre Browning model, procurement of the wing guns proved more complicated, and eventually machine guns from three different calibres were fitted: .30 calibre standard US guns, .303 calibre standard British guns, and 7.92mm, which was widely available in China; truly a one-of-a-kind model.



This P-40 had just been adorned with the famed shark mouth that became to epitomise the fighters of the 1st AVG. (Malcolm Rosholt Collection)



A P-40 of the 3rd Squadron (Hell's Angels) of the 1st AVG seen with his two .50 calibre nose machine guns being harmonised by armourers. (Malcolm Rosholt Collection) assets, as well as an oil embargo, the Americans hoped to deter Tokyo from continuing its expansion into Southeast Asia. The CAMCO was authorised to begin the recruitment of 106 pilots and 359 technicians for the 2nd AVG unit. The operation was carried out by Richard Aldworth.

However, the effort came too late; the crews arrived in China towards the end of November but no aircraft were available for them. Lauchlin Currie informed Chennault that all available airframes had been diverted for the RAF and US forces in the Philippines. Nevertheless, he promised that a first batch of 24 bombers would be delivered in December, followed by 66 more. Chennault could only hope that he would begin attacking Japan before the year's end.

In July, Chennault went to Singapore for high level conversations with RAF Air Marshal Brooke-Popham. The British military authorities in Southeast Asia also agreed with Chiang Kai Shek that the 1st AVG would contribute to the defence of Burma should the need arise, 'there was an understanding, amounting practically to an agreement'. They were also seriously considering setting up a third AVG manned by British 'volunteers' similar to their American counterparts and equipped with Brewster Buffalo fighters and Blenheim bombers. The unit could also be reinforced with American crewed P-43 fighters. The three 'volunteer' groups would be placed under Chennault's command.

The 1st AVG was officially set up on 1 August 1941, under Chennault, who was appointed with CNAF colonel rank. He joined his men for a three-month thorough training programme in Burma. His command group was bolstered by four official USAAF officers of the AMISSCA. The priority was to transform the pilots on the P-40C and even to train some of them as fighter pilots due to their previous operational background.

However, there were a series of accidents and losses and those unable to become fighter pilots were assigned to ground staff jobs. Others decided to quit, protesting the poor living conditions and the strict training regime. The training was also hampered by the lack of spare parts and ammunition. Lauchlin Currie got around this by getting the authorisation to requisition them from RAF stores in North Africa or the USAAF in the Philippines.

Each training day started by a lecture by Chennault who detailed Japanese aircraft characteristics or tactics. He particularly warned his men about the new Zero fighter. Chennault also introduced guess speakers such as Chinese aces, US Army Lend-Lease officers, Allison engine specialists, and war correspondents.

Using a training manual captured and translated by the Chinese, Chennault explained the tactics that would be used by Japanese fighter pilots, particularly their exceptionally good ability in dogfighting and aerobatics. To counter these, Chennault instructed his pilots to forget what they had learnt in US service, as well as their racial superiority complex about the Japanese. He drew upon his own air force experience as China's chief air advisor in 1937 – 1938, and on the actions of Soviet pilots.

Chennault advised his pilots to operate in pairs, take the high perch, dive on the Japanese planes, open fire, then dive away and do it again. Never stay and fight, never try to turn, never try to mix with them. Use speed and firepower to disrupt their formations.

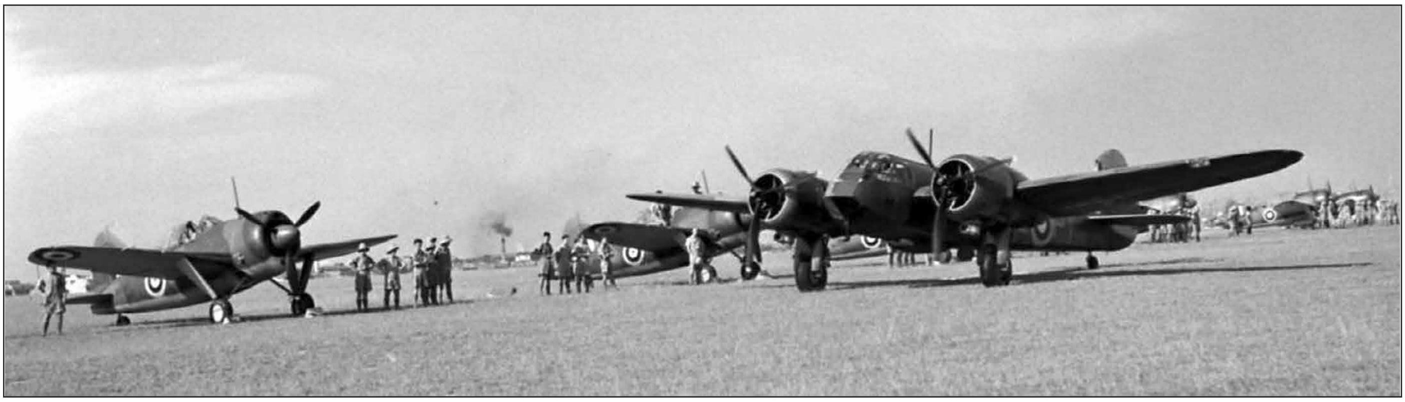
At the outbreak of the Pacific War, the 1st AVG was the only Allied unit to practice this style of fighting. It took many painful months for other air forces to relearn and finally adopt the kind of tactic already advocated by Chennault.

On 6 September, an Imperial Conference in Tokyo specifically discussed the Lend-Lease programme granted to China along with the arrival of the 1st AVG in Burma that the Japanese Intelligence had revealed. During the debate, the Japanese officials pointed out the danger Chennault's unit would pose to Japanese forces in China and that it showed direct proof of a Sino-American collusion against Japan. This would only harden the current negotiations taking place with Washington. It is unknown whether the Japanese knew that Roosevelt had been planning the bombing of their cities but what is certain, is the new rapprochement between the American and Chinese led the Japanese to work intensely on new war plans.

The Roosevelt administration played its last trump card, hoping that economic sanctions and a secret air war would force Tokyo to mollify its stance. Washington was even willing to take the risk up to the last extremity. As Henry Stimson recalled, on 25 November, Roosevelt told his military advisors that the challenge was 'how we should manoeuvre Japan into the position of firing the first shot without allowing too much danger to ourselves'.

However, events did not unfold in that manner. When faced with the ultimatum to either evacuate China and Indochina or

AVG P-40s belonging to the 1st Pursuit Squadron 'Adam and Eve', identified by the white stripe around the rear fuselage. By the end of October 1941, the 1st AVG was declared operational. Chennault began to send some of its aircraft in secret reconnaissance missions over Thailand to check if the Japanese had forward deployed some of their air units operating from French Indochina. (Albert Grandolini Collection)



In addition to the setting up of the 1st AVG, Washington had envisaged creating two additional American 'volunteer groups'. One of them would be a joint enterprise with the British authorities in Burma who would lend some of their Brewster Buffalo fighters and Blenheim bombers. All would be operated with Chinese markings. This photo shows the two types scheduled to be deployed for an additional volunteer group in China. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

face harsher sanctions from the United States, the Japanese war cabinet came to the realisation that time was running out for Japan The Japanese Prime Minister, Tojo indicated that after losing some 160,000 men in China, he could not back down now.

At first, Japan was poised to join Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union, but now the advocates of the 'Southern Operation', the invasion of the Philippines, Dutch Indies and British territories of Malaya and Burma, were gaining ground. The nation's strategic oil reserves were limited and could only be replaced by capturing the production sites in the Netherland colonies.

In September 1941, the Japanese Navy recalled all its air units in China. After refitting and retraining, they were concentrated in Formosa (Taiwan) and moved to southern Indochina with French Vichy government approval. The Japanese Army retained only 14 squadrons in China although 830 aircraft in 81 squadrons still faced the Soviets in Manchuria.

The British Intelligence suspected secret deployments of Japanese air units in Thailand whose government had recently been supported by Tokyo during its short conflict with the French along its Cambodian and Laotian borders. As the RAF was not authorised to fly reconnaissance missions over neutral Thailand, the task was given to the AVG. On 24 October, Chennault sent three P-40Cs to reconnoitre the airfields in northern Thailand, up to Chiang Mai, in the first AVG operational mission. No Japanese activities were reported. Two days later, the Japanese operating from Indochina sent high altitude Ki-46 aircraft over Burma in photo reconnaissance missions. Both the AVG and the RAF were unable to intercept them.

Undoubtedly, both Tokyo and Washington were now on a collision course. On 1 November, the Japanese cabinet unanimously decided to go to war if the United States did not accede to their demands before the end of the month. On 24 November, the Combined Fleet's carrier pilots completed their detailed briefing on their Pearl Harbor mission. The next day, the Japanese Navy's main striking force of six aircraft carriers was set in motion and steamed out of the harbour. The nascent American secret air war strategy was a failure.

8

WAY OF A FIGHTER

When the Pacific war broke out on 7 December 1941, the AVG had 62 P-40Cs available in three squadrons. Out of the 99 recruited pilots, three had already been killed in training, 12 had decided to return home and three were affected to staff positions. It is outside the scope of this study to go through details of the AVG combat operation records. It is sufficient to state that the group military experts predicted would not last three weeks in combat, actually fought for seven months over Burma, China, Thailand, and French Indochina.

Better known now as the 'Flying Tigers', they officially claimed 299 Japanese aircraft destroyed with another 153 probably destroyed when the unit was disbanded on 4 July1942. Historians after the war estimated that the real AVG tally was around 115 Japanese aircraft shot down in combat which, nevertheless, made the unit one of the most successful at this early stage of the conflict. It established Chennault's reputation as a brilliant tactician and leader.

All of this was achieved with an official acknowledged loss of 12 P-40s in air combat and 61 on the ground. In fact, the unit lost 86 P-40s from all causes, combat, accident and abandonment. Some 22 pilots were killed and three taken prisoners. Whatever the true tally, during the dark days of early 1942, when the war spread to Asia and Western powers were suffering defeat after defeat against the Japanese, their real accomplishments were highlighted, they were treated as heroes and the Flying Tigers became a legend until that very day.

In April 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt wrote of the AVG:

> The outstanding gallantry and conspicuous daring that the AVG combined with their unbelievable efficiency, is a source of tremendous pride throughout the whole of America. The fact that they have labored under the shortages and difficulties is keenly appreciated.

Despite the American public support, by the summer of 1942 the unit was exhausted, with no replacements of personnel apparent even if additional P-40Es were taken on charge. The poor living conditions, incessant combat missions and changes of airfields, impacted on morale in the AVG which was sinking lower.

At the beginning of 1942, General George Marshall, Army Chief of Staff, had planned to transform the AVG into a regular US Army

The aircraft of the disbanded 1st AVG was transferred to the USAAF 23rd Fighter Group in July 1942. The first American fighter unit deployed on the Chinese theatre inherited used airframes with poor readiness like this row of P-40C, P-40E and P-43A fighters. (USAF)

After the disbandment of the Flying Tigers, Chennault was reinstated as a colonel and immediately promoted to Brigadier General commanding US air units in China, initially designated CATF. (USAF)

Brigadier General Chennault, on the right, shaking hands with his direct superior, Lieutenant General Joseph Stilwell who arrived in China in March 1942 to be the Chief of Staff for Chiang Kai Shek, commanding both the US and Chinese forces. Their mutual distrust and divergent opinions about the use of air power, were an issue for the unity of command in this theatre. Stilwell's frequent conflicts with Chiang led to his recall in October 1944. (USAF)

unit, which would have the great benefit of being already deployed in theatre, ready to carry out war against the Japanese. However, the Chinese refused as did most of the American pilots. Nevertheless, the merger became a necessity if the unit was to continue to be logistically supported.

The plan was to transfer the unit to the USAAF as the 23rd Fighter Group by retaining its personnel. However, only four pilots elected to stay along with 16 technicians and six staff personnel. Most of the pilots felt they had been badly treated by the military in terms of reassignment, ranks and their tour of duty with the CNAF was not considered. Sixteen choose to stay on but as civilian pilots flying for the China National Aviation Corporation (CNAC), a joint Chinese American commercial airline, in part owned by Pan American World Airways.

Operating DC-3 transports, the pilots flew the air bridge between India and China over the Himalayas, dubbed the 'Hump', receiving $800 a month, plus up to $20 an hour for overtime. Most of the others wanted a rest period by returning to the United States. The majority were later reintegrated to their original corps. Whatever their later service, they received no official recognition for their time with the AVG. Their victories did not count towards qualifying them as fighter aces in the Army, Navy or Marines. The pilot's CAMCO year did not count as 'time in grade' for promotion, retirement or the points that determined a man's priority for discharge at the end of the war. They were even denied their petition to wear the Flying Tiger pin on their military uniforms. This was the result for these secret shadow air warriors and a destiny shared by their commander – often publicly glorified but facing continued hostility from the hierarchy, not helped by his stubborn character.

Although the career of Chennault during the Second World War is outside the scope of this study, it is sufficient to say that when the AVG was disbanded on 4 July1942, Chennault was reinstated as a colonel and immediately promoted to Brigadier General commanding US Army air units in China – initially designated China Air Task Force (CATF). It was part of the USAAF 10th Air Force covering the newly setup China-Burma-India (CBI) theatre. The CATF initially had 54 P-40s and a few P-43As and was brought up in February 1943 to 114 P-40s, 12 B-25s and some transporters. Chennault was under the direct command of Major General Clayton Bissell with whom the relationship was tense. In China, he was placed under the supervision of General Joseph Stilwell. In charge of all American operations and aid to China, he became de facto acting Chief of Staff to the Chinese armed forces for Chiang Kai Shek. Madame Chiang Kai Shek also encouraged the US War Department to appoint Chennault as Chief Air Advisor for the CNAF as he was familiar with Chinese military aviation.

Despite its limited resources, Chennault forward deployed his assets in airbases around Kweilin (Guilin), 500 miles east of Kunming, to harass Japanese positions around Hankow, Canton, and Hong Kong. In recognition of its increasingly important role, the USAAF formally brought up the CATF status into a 14th Air Force in March 1943. In the meantime, Chennault was promoted to a major general rank.

In October 1943, as one of the wings of the 14th Air Force, a Chinese American Composite Wing (CACW) of the CNAF was

The China isolated theatre was re-supplied only by air from bases in India across the Himalaya Mountains range. The workhorses of this Herculean effort were the C-46s, alongside the C-47s and the C-54s, of the USAAF ATC that delivered up to 20,000 tons of supplies per month by the summer of 1945. (USAF)

As shown in this photo, China was a backward battlefield compared to the other Allied theatres of operations, receiving only a trickle of the Lend-Lease allocations, some $1,548,794,966 or 3.2 percent of the total allowed to the other Allied nations. Chennault could only count on second rate equipment of various models, like the Curtiss P-40, which made up most of his units throughout the war. They were furthermore impaired by frequent lack of spare parts and very basic maintenance installations. (USAF)

established. Ably commanded by Chennault, the unit was composed of Chinese and American airmen, with a ratio of approximately two Chinese for every American, equipped with P-40s, B-25s and C-47s. The purpose was to improve the Chinese operational capabilities by adopting American operational procedures. As the Chinese gained experience, Chennault withdraw more and more American personnel. The purpose was to use the CACW to train the Chinese in combat and expand an American-oriented CNAF for the post-war era as a tool to foster Washington's influence in the country.

Throughout his tenure as the commander of the American air assets in China, Chennault was opposed to the general strategy adopted by his superior, Lieutenant General Joseph Stilwell who arrived in China in March 1942. Stilwell had served previously as a military attaché in China and was one of the few American senior officers who spoke Chinese fluently. At first this seemed an important asset to gain the confidence of the Chinese. However, in contrast to Chennault who had acquainted himself well with the Chinese intricacies of the local politics and grasped their wider military and political interactions, Stilwell adhered strictly to military matters.

After directing the battles of the Chinese divisions in northern Burma in 1942, Stilwell's main objective was now to open a new road through the jungles and mountains to join India to southwest China and deliver US military aid. He also wanted to reform the Chinese armed forces into a core force of 30 modern divisions, to be engaged against the Japanese. This implied the disbandment of numerous Chinese units of mostly regional troops and the firing of incompetent commanders.

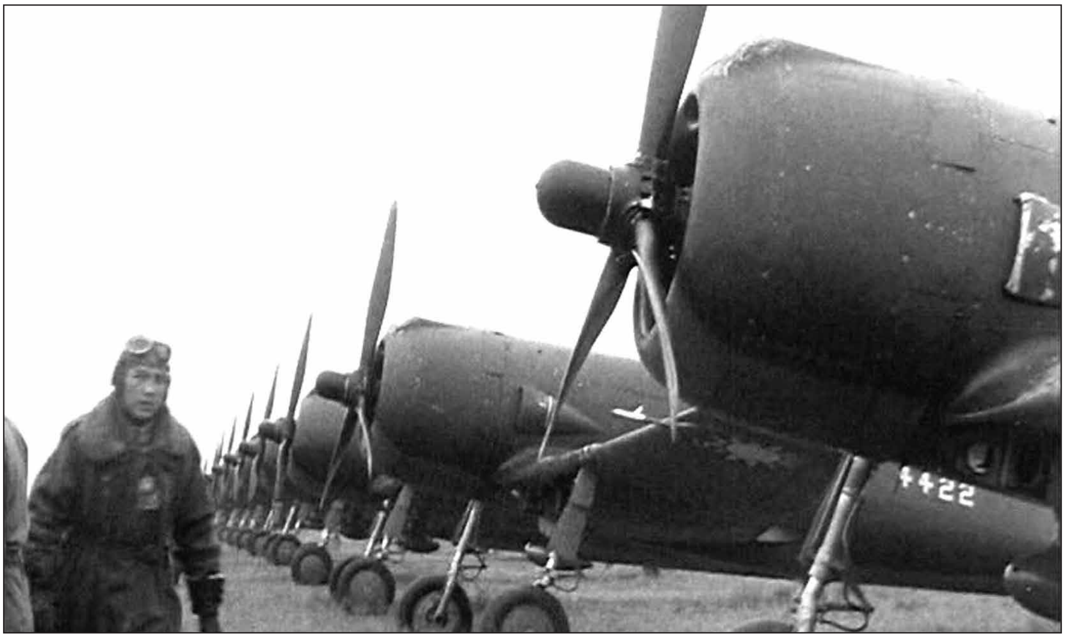
Chiang, who held a vastly divided warlords coalition together by combining threat of using force, patronising diplomacy and bribery, saw this reform proposal as a threat to his own authority. Chiang Kai Shek was more interested in conserving his troops and the Allied Lend-Lease supplies for countering any sudden Japanese offensive. He preferred to adopt a defensive strategy and left the Western powers to deal with the Japanese, mustering his forces for dealing with the Chinese Communists when the war was over. For him, the Japanese were 'a disease of the skin', but the Communists were 'the disease of the heart'.

With hindsight, the strategy was probably the only affordable option for the exhausted and isolated Nationalist China. Right from the beginning, Washington's strategy was to give priority to the fight against Germany, Japan came after. China was at the bottom of the American priorities. Lend-Lease allocations to the Chinese were kept to a minimum with just enough to maintain China in the war, preventing hundreds of thousands Japanese troops from being

It was only in spring 1945 that the 14th Air Force began to receive more modern equipment, like these Republic P-47Ds of the 81st Fighter Group at Angkang, near Chengtu. (USAF) redeployed elsewhere against the Allied forces.

Furthermore, with the severing of the Burma Road and whilst waiting for the building of a new one, only a small amount of supplies was delivered by air across the 'Hump', the Himalaya Mountains. Both Chennault and Stilwell fought over how to appropriate most of the delivered goods. The situation eased with the creation of the Air Transport Command (ATC) that took over the task of ferrying supplies. The tonnages delivered increased incrementally up to 20,000 tons per month. Despite high casualty rates due to the terrain and weather, as well as occasional Japanese fighter attacks, by the end of the war a total of 650,000 tons of goods had been delivered to China by a fleet of 330 C-46s, 167 C-47s and 132 C-54s.

By spring 1945, both the 23rd, 51st, and 311th Fighter Groups of the 14th Air Force had also abandoned their P-40s for P-51Bs and P-51Ds. These Mustangs belonged to the 75th Fighter Squadron of the 23rd Fighter Group. (USAF)

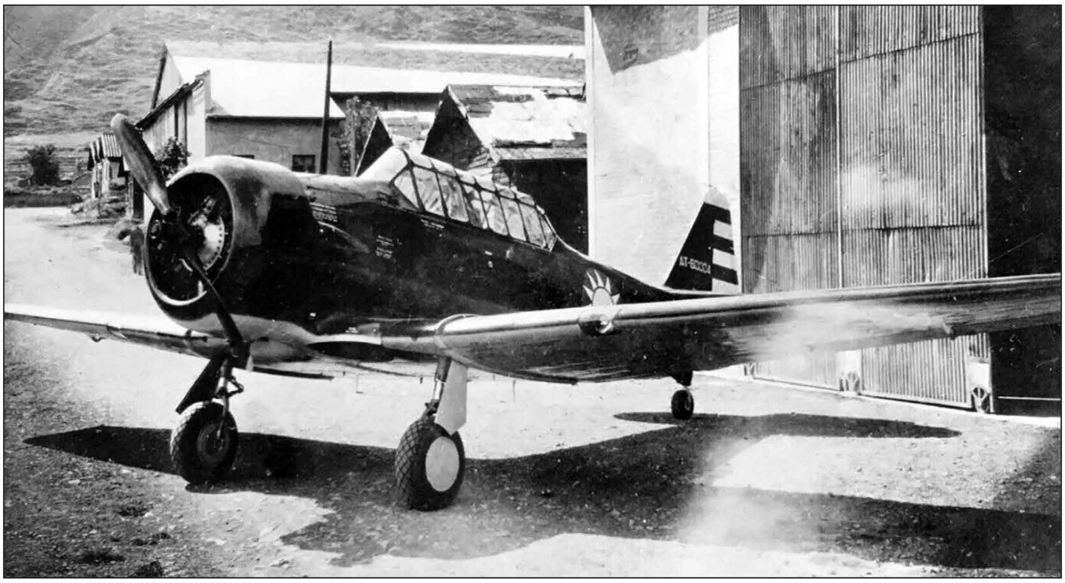


The CNAF remained a relatively small force throughout the Second World War, understrength and underequipped. By 1943, it had eight squadrons with some 53 P-66s. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

The supply issues were only part of the problem. Whilst Stilwell wanted to keep most of the Lend – Lease tonnages for reequipping the Chinese Army, including the units in training in India, Chennault wanted aircraft to strengthen its 14th Air Force and the CNAF. Stilwell was completely committed to rebuilding the core of a modern Chinese Army for further offensives. Chennault advocated for a powerful air force to be engaged immediately against the Japanese forces in China and even to attack Japan. By waiting for the opening of a direct link route to allow the delivery of the Army heavy equipment, Chennault argued that the only available means to carry out offensive actions against the enemy was by air power. Supported by Chiang Kai Shek and the US ambassador, Clarence Gauss, he relentlessly requested a bomber force to directly attack Japan. Stilwell retorted that such an action would surely lead the Japanese to launch a new wide scale offensive to destroy the bomber bases and that the Chinese Army was still not strong enough to face it. The controversy went straight to the White House where Chennault had many supporters and where he kept a direct communication channel with Roosevelt, bypassing an angry General Marshall.

In 1943, the CNAF also had four fighter squadrons equipped with both P-40s and P-43s. A group of Chinese pilots posed in front of one of these P-43s. (USAF)

The relationship between Stilwell and Chiang Kai Shek reached a new low at the beginning of 1943. It appeared that the former had accepted a reduction in the deliveries of Lend-Lease equipment and aircraft for China and this reduction profited Great Britain and Soviet Union. Stilwell further suggested to the US War Department that no aircraft should be delivered to the CNAF 'until they proved



The CNAF also received a small number of North American AT-6Ds in early 1945. Some were also armed and used as light strikers against bandits, reckless warlords and during clashes with the communist forces. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

they could make effective use of what they had'.

To solve the problem, Roosevelt sent the USAAF Chief of Staff, General Hap Arnold to China, in February 1943, to assess the situation. He discovered that the mood was no better between Stilwell and Chennault (who had been appointed by Chiang Kai Shek as the CNAF Chief of Staff in July 1943). In this position, he incessantly requested new aircraft to implement a promised plan of 12 squadrons of fighters, four bomber squadrons, one reconnaissance and one transport squadrons. In April 1944, he wrote a new letter to Roosevelt complaining that nothing had arrived for the new CNAF expansion plan of 579 fighters and 134 medium bombers and that Stilwell still blocked any delivery. On the positive side, Chennault implemented an important plan to train Chinese air cadets in India and the United States. By March 1945, some 2,100 Chinese pilots had been trained.

Finally, it was decided to base the brand new B-29 bombers (Operation Matterhorn) in China during the summer of 1944. However, this strategic force would not be placed under Chennault's command. As predicted by Stilwell, when the first missions were carried out against Japan, Tokyo reacted by launching Operation Ichi – Go. This was the last offensive the Japanese were able to carry out in China, with the purpose of opening a 'continental corridor' from Manchuria to Indochina. Foremost, they captured and destroyed the American air bases in the southeast of China but their advance was finally stopped due to severe logistic problems – their lines of communications being relentlessly attacked by the 14th Air Force and the CNAF. Whatever the reasons, including the difficulties to sustain such a heavy bomber force in China, the B-29s were transferred to the new conquered islands in the central Pacific.

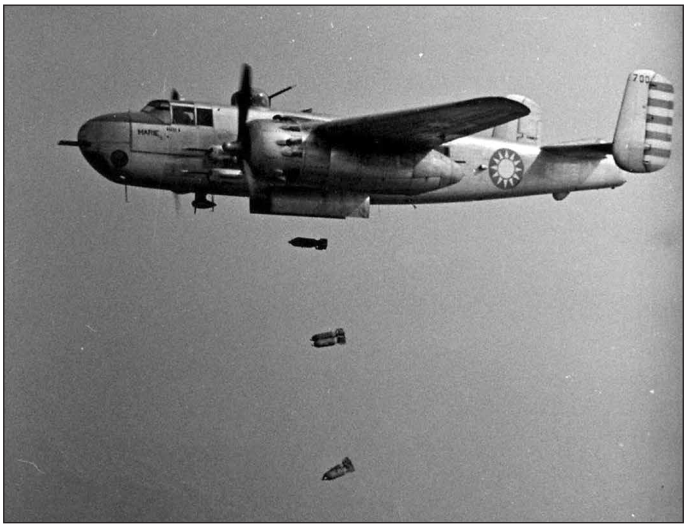
Under intense pressure, the Chinese fought against the new Japanese offensive. Stilwell complained that Chiang Kai Shek was delaying concerted action with the British for opening a new front in northern Burma. Stilwell seemed to be supported by Roosevelt. Angered by this accusation, Chiang Kai Shek threatened withdrawing American aid, suggesting that he could sign an armistice with the Japanese. He expressly asked for the recalling of Stilwell who did not hide his contempt for the Chinese leader.

Roosevelt now had only two choices: to sustain Stilwell and break with Chiang Kai Shek or to fire Stilwell and support Chiang Kai Shek. Fearing he would be blamed for China's collapse, Roosevelt quickly backed down. He recalled Stilwell in October 1944 and divided the CBI Theatre into two parts. Major General Albert Wedemeyer would be responsible for China as Chief of Staff and General Daniel Sultan would be responsible for India and Burma.

The new Chiang Kai Shek's Chief of Staff arrived in a tense situation but surprisingly, he was quick to adapt to the peculiarities of the China theatre and restored confidence with the Chinese. Furthermore, he advocated an urgent increase in air aid supply to China when he discovered that the CNAF had not received any of the aircraft which the Munitions Allocation Board had authorised.

AUSTIN J. RUSSELL
LT. COL. A.C.
MAJ. WANG. YU-KEN

The purpose of the CACW was to train Chinese personnel up to the standard of the USAAF. The unit was composed of Chinese and American airmen, at a ratio of approximately two Chinese for every American, with a dual command system for the commanding officers of the 17th Fighter Squadron, 5th Fighter Group. (USAF)



A B-25G of the 1st Bombardment Group, CACW, seen dropping bombs over Japanese positions in 1945. (USAF)

中國空軍美籍志願隊紀念
中國空軍美志願隊榮譽紀念
正義之師
全國慰勞抗戰將士委員會總會敬贈

Chennault was forced to resign on 1 August 1945. He was replaced by Lieutenant General George E. Stratemeyer, seen here at left, who oversaw both the 10th and 14th Air Forces. The 10th Air Force was transferred from India to China in July 1945. (USAF)

With Chennault's backing, he urgently ordered the allocation of 415 aircraft for the CNAF, including P-51s and B-25s. He also increased the allocation of tonnage to the 14th Air Force which received 14,170 tons of materials in November 1944, in comparison to 8,426 tons in September.

With new equipment, Chennault significantly increased the air operations, launching attacks as far as Manchuria, Hainan Island, or northern Indochina. By summer 1945, despite massive logistical problems, the 14th Air Force had compiled an impressive combat record. In three years of operations, it claimed some 2,600 enemy aircraft destroyed and 2,230 million tons of shipping sunk or damaged. More than ever, Chennault's relationship with Chiang Kai Shek was restored, the Chinese leader particularly appreciating his loyalty during the darkest hours in its relations with the Americans. The acerbic warrior, at odds with his superiors for decades, believed that his leadership had merited a third star and command of all air units in theatre.

Another victim of the restructuring of the 'China Team' under former President Roosevelt, was Lauchlin Currie, his left-leaning special economic advisor of the New Deal era. Being a strong proponent of the secret air war strategy against Japan, he particularly backed Chennault for the creation of the AVG and in his feud with Stilwell. Accused of being a Soviet agent in the onset of the Cold War, he was forced into exile in Colombia. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

However, Generals Marshall and Arnold would not allow a China maverick to triumph over the old-boy network. If the USAAF commander acknowledged Chennault's 'exceptionally able tactical control of the operations and his combat success', he pointed out that he 'did not exercise the necessary administrative and executive control of his present units to warrant independence'. He fully endorsed the previous rating made by Stilwell about his subordinate who stated that Chennault 'has decided limitations' and that 'within his sphere he is superior, but his administration is terrible, and his judgement of men is weak'.

When the US Army began to prepare for the invasion of Japan, they also set out to get rid of Chennault. The sacking of Stilwell

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The project to forward base B-29 heavy bombers in China to attack Japan, was taken at the Casablanca Conference in January 1943. However, it was soon found that such a force could not be logistically sustained. After a period of seven months, the scheme was scrapped and the bombers redeployed to the newly conquered Marianas Islands. This B-29 of the 468th Bombardment Group seen at Penshang Airfield. (USAF) would not be without retaliations. The campaign was simplified by Chennault's loyalty to some of his less admirable associates. Altogether, the Army investigators produced files on 300 smuggling cases involving members or ex-members of the AVG, CNAC, CATF and 14th Air Force. For example, Harry Sutter, a friend and former instructor with the CNAF, was accused of smuggling of gold, drugs and other valuables. Another of his officers, Butch Carney, shot and killed an Army sergeant in a poker game. There were also rumours that Chennault was involved in sexual affairs with the American women working for him as secretaries.

Chennault stood by his friends to the point where his own reputation was tarnished, thus providing a lever to the men in Washington who wanted him removed. With President Roosevelt terminally ill, he had lost his most precious ally. In March 1945, Arnold nominated General Stratemayer as not only an air advisor to Wedemeyer but later, also as senior air officer in China, directly commanding both the 10th and 14th Air Forces, China Theatre. After a four-month holding action, Chennault accepted Hap Arnold's pointed recommendation that he 'take advantage of the retirement privileges now available to physically disqualified officer'. Arnold's letter contained the explicit threat that if Chennault did not go gracefully, he would be demoted back to colonel and then retired. Chennault left China on 1 August1945. Two weeks later, Japan surrendered.

The career of one of the most popular and controversial American commanders ended in disgrace. Some of his former Flying Tigers tried to start a new life as civilians. In California, a group of AVG veterans headed by Bob Prescot, created the Flying Tiger Line, which in time, became the United States' largest air-freight carrier. In Washington, the team that supported Chennault was disbanded with the new Truman administration. No more secret air operations were required and most returned to a more routine life in their respective administrations.

During the hysteria of the McCarthy 'witch hunt' after the Second World War, Lauchlin Currie was accused of being a member of the 'Silver master spy ring'. He fled the country, took up residence in Colombia and had his American citizenship revoked in 1956. Many of the old China lobby, such as Paul Frillmann, were similarly tarnished by their association, real or imagined, with the Communists. However, William D. Pawley of the CAMCO became a millionaire with his aviation dealings in China and India. He used his wealth to fight the Cold War as an ambassador to Peru and Brazil, sponsoring commando raids on Cuba.

Similar to this example, circumstances would soon lead Chennault back into an Asia plunged into the turmoil of revolutions and wars of independence.

9

BACK TO CHINA

The Japanese capitulation happened so suddenly that it created an extremely critical military situation for the Nationalist government, which was unprepared for the sudden end of the war. More worrying was the entrance of a new actor, the Soviet Union. Agreeing with the Western Allies, Stalin fulfilled his promise to enter the war against Japan within three months after the surrender of Germany. The Soviets then launched a massive offensive, Operation August Storm on 9 August 1945, that saw its armies occupying Manchuria, Inner Mongolia, the northern part of Korea and the Kurile Islands. Assembling off the Chinese coasts were some 50,000 US Marines of the III Marine Amphibious Corps, who landed in northern China to disarm the Japanese (Operation Beleaguer) and provided a counterweight to the massive Soviet presence.

Since 1936, an awkward agreement had been concluded between the regime of Chiang Kai Shek and its Communist opponents. A truce had been agreed in the name of the national unity against the Japanese and the Communists agreed in principle, to put their armed forces under Nationalist control. Mao Tse Tung (Mao Zedong) adopted a passive strategy against the Japanese, preferring to extend its military political control over the countryside in the northern part of the country. Its armed forces,

An SBC-5 Helldiver of the VB-10 from the carrier USS *Intrepid* over Tientsin, 5 September 1945. On this date, some 86 aircraft were launched from the carrier as a show of strength during the demobilisation of Japanese forces in the area. (US Navy)

Covering the landing of the US Marines in Shanghai was this TBM-3E Avenger of the VT-89 of the carrier USS Antietam. The torpedo bomber overflew the famed Broadway Hotel and the Garden Bridge at the northern end of the Bund. (US Navy)

The USS Antietam moved north within the cadre of Operation Beleaguer, to cover the deployment of the US Marines to Peiping. Shown here is an Avenger of the VT-89 overflying the Summer Palace on the outskirts of the former Imperial Capital. In 1949, the victorious Communists moved the seat of their government and returned the former name of Peking to the city. (US Navy)

known as the new 8th Army and 4th Army, were out of reach for the Nationalist Chinese Army.

The situation spiralled out of control in 1941 when fighting broke out between the two suspicious allies. The exhausted Nationalist's adopted a defensive strategy against the Japanese, whilst massing a great part of their forces for a blockade of the Communist zones. Both waited for the end of the war to resume their quarrel and both were launched into a race to reoccupy the areas where the Japanese had surrendered – particularly the great coastal cities or industrialised Manchuria.

Switching side and hoping to save their skins, many Chinese collaborating armies rallied with the Nationalists. However, in a huge country like China with few good, paved roads, most of the troops' displacements were made by boats using the internal waterways or the railways along which were structured all units' deployments. However, most of them had been severely damaged by the fighting. If Chiang Kai Shek hoped to win the race, he had to rely on air transportation.

Taking sides, President Truman agreed to transfer Nationalist units from the southwest to occupy cities in the former Japanese-held zone. The United States allocated 200 long-range Douglas C-54 Skymaster transports of the 10th Air Force to an operation which flew 26,237 men from three corps into Nanking (Nanjing) and Shanghai during September. From these points, they flew a further 5,000 men to Peiping (Beiping). The US tactical transport squadrons, on C-46s and C-47s and the Chinese themselves, appeared to have flown in a further 30,000 personnel. From October, the American 7th Fleet moved another 280,000 men by sea in a programme lasting until May 1946.

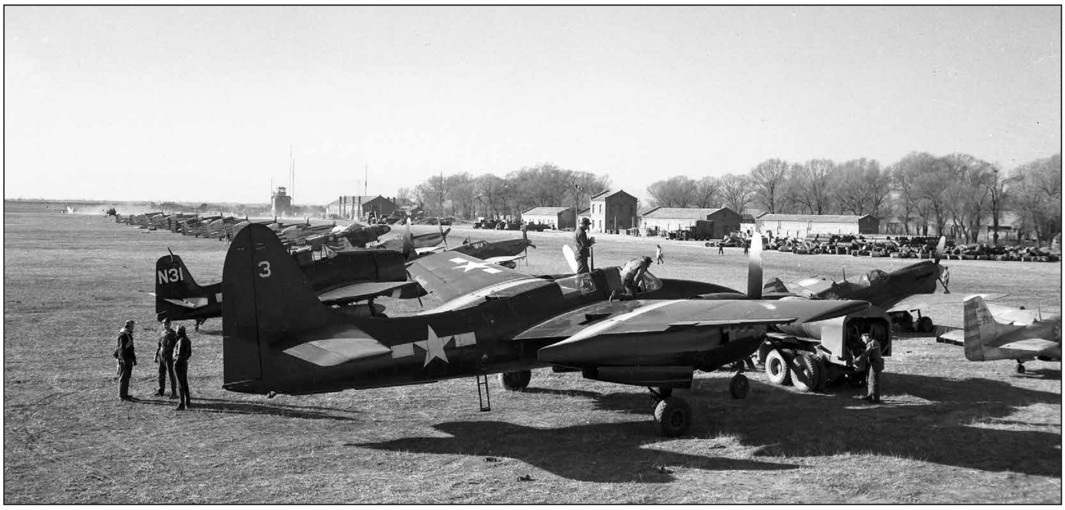
If Chiang Kai Shek succeeded to reaffirm his authority on western and central China, it was the Communists who won the race for Manchuria, partly helped by the Soviet forces. However, through negotiations, Stalin finally allowed the Nationalist troops to be deployed inside the great cities of Manchuria, many of them flown in by USAAF aircraft. Much to Mao's dismay and anger, Chiang Kai Shek even went as far as asking the Soviets to remain in Manchuria until May 1946, so that KMT troops could take over the region directly from them. In return, Stalin was granted Port Arthur (Dalian) as a Soviet naval base with its adjacent airfield.

The end of the war accelerated the delivery of 500 aircraft from the Lend-Lease backlog for the Chinese. Washington agreed to give equipment no longer needed in the Burma-India theatre and it was to be transferred to China for a period of six months ending 2 March 1946. The CNAF was reorganised around an 8 1/3 group programme. By mid-1946, it was composed of four fighter groups (P-40s, P-47s and P-51s), two transport groups (C-46s and C-47s), one medium bomber group (B-25s) and one heavy bomber group (B-24s), together with one reconnaissance squadron on Lockheed F-5s with a total of 936 aircraft, with 160,000 personnel, including 5,000 pilots.

Several former Japanese aircraft were also put into use with the 6th Mixed Fighter-Bomber Group with Ki-43, Ki-44, Ki-61 and Ki-84 fighters, as well as Ki-48 and Ki-49 bombers. The unit operated until running out of most spare parts and was finally disbanded in June 1946. However, the reinforced Chinese Air Force still did not have enough transport aircraft for the task. It only began to take over 70 C-47s at the end of 1945. In a rushed programme in 1946, some 500 Chinese pilots and technicians were sent to Bergstrom Field, Austin, Texas, for a transition course on the C-46. Some 60 USAAF C-46s were put at their disposal and each crew received 150 flight hours before being sent back to their units in China.

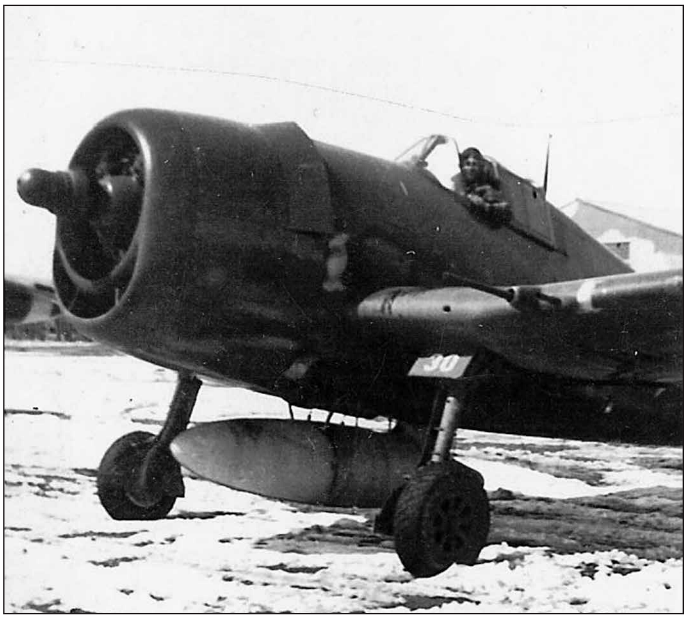
The Americans rationalised their intervention in China as being a stabilising measure in the chaos of Japanese surrender. They also sought to act as mediator in the negotiations to prevent a civil war that would expand Soviet influence. Aiming to occupy a dominant position in East Asia, the US

An F4U-4 Corsair of the VMF-211 landing on the Nanyuan Airfield, Peiping, 1946. (US Navy)



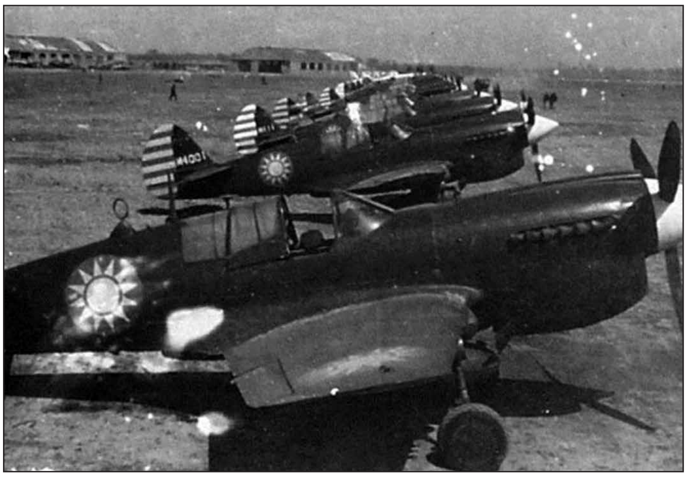
By early 1946, the Marines deployed two air groups, the MAG-12 and MAG-24, to Nanyuan Airfield, Peiping, to assure air support in northern China. A newly inducted F7F-3N Tigercat of the VMF (N)-531 seen here beside an F6F-5N Hellcat of the VMF (N)-541. The two American aircraft are parked amongst various CNAF aircraft, including P-40L, P-51B and P-51D fighters, as well as a Lockheed F-5 Lightning reconnaissance aircraft. (USMC)

Two Grumman F7F-3Ns of the VMF (N)-531 flying over the Great Wall of China, north of Peiping, spring 1946. (USMC)



A F6F-5N Hellcat of the VMF (N)-541 warming up its engine during the harsh winter of 1945 at Nanyuan Airfield for another patrol along the axis Peiping-Tientsin. There were some skirmishes between the Marines and Communist guerrillas despite an official truce. (USMC)

Some 200 C-54s of the ATC were mobilised to transport Chinese units from southern China towards the reoccupied cities of Nanking, Shanghai and Peiping. (USAF)



At the Japanese capitulation, most of the CNAF fighter units were still equipped with the Curtis P-40 of various marks. They would continue until 1948. (Wings of China)

The USAAF transport units, both from the 10th and 14th Air Forces, as well as those of the ATC, were fully mobilised after the Japanese capitulation, to ferry Chinese troops from central and southern China to the formerly occupied coastal areas in a race with the Communist forces. Soldiers are shown taking their meal before boarding a C-47. (USAF)

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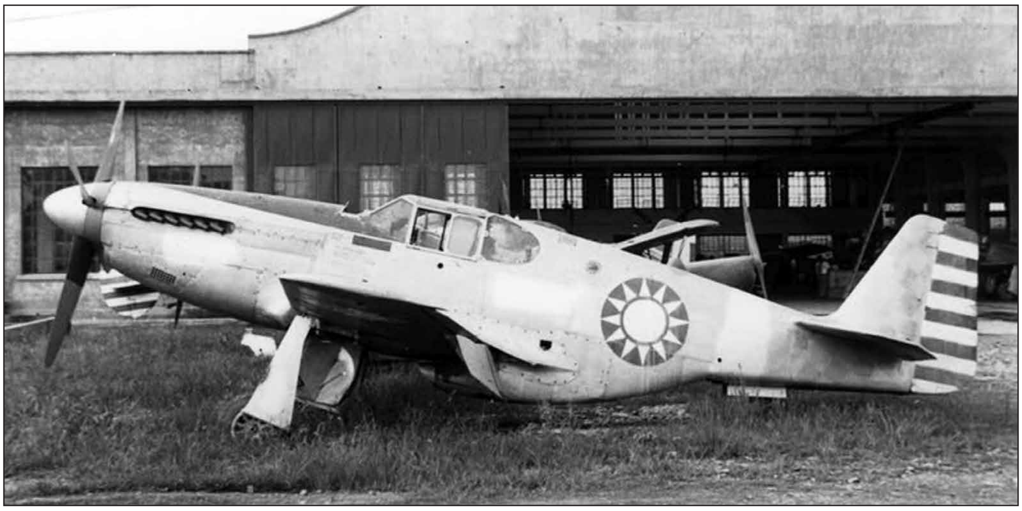
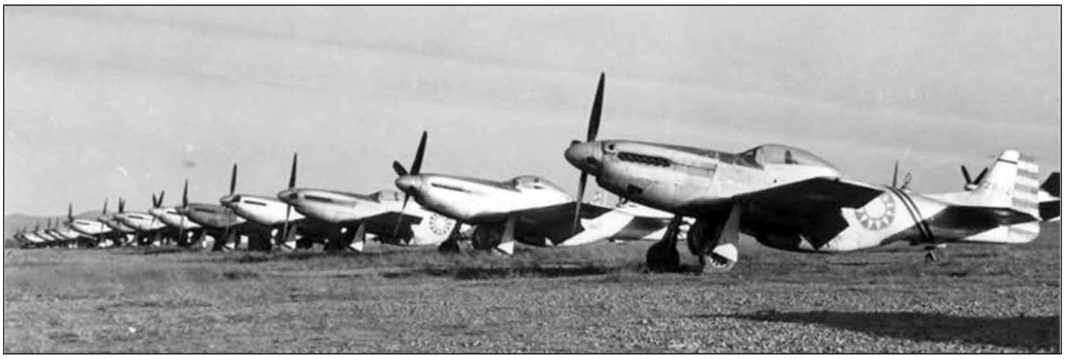
Most of the Chinese troops, including those of the 92nd and 94th Armies, were ferried by the units of the USAAF ATC that used mainly Curtis C-46s. (USAF)



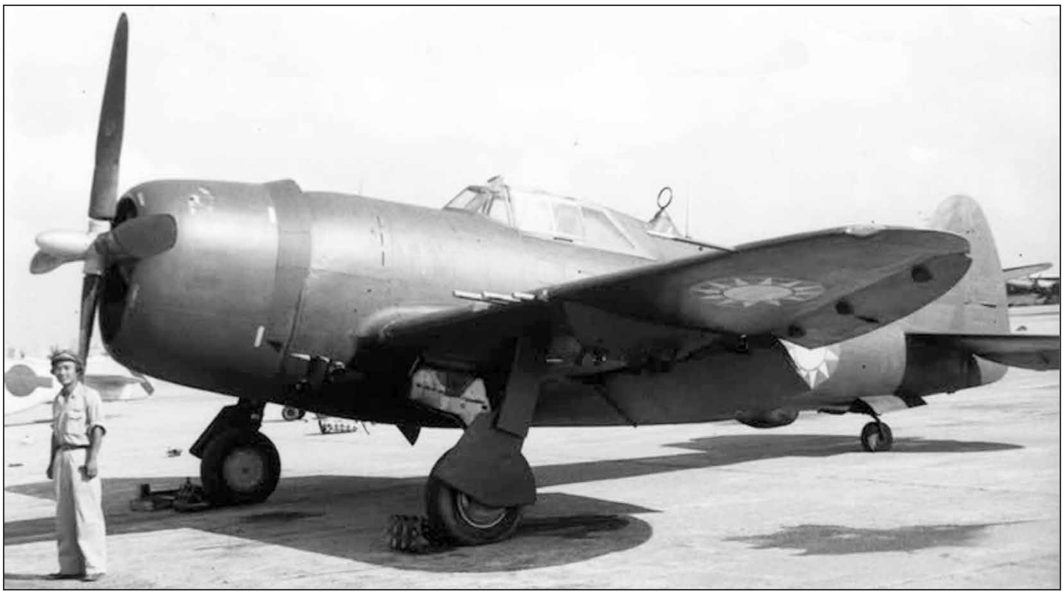
The end of the Second World War allowed for delivery to the CNAF, a backlog of long awaited aircraft, funded by the Lend-Lease Programme, but withheld for various reasons. This P-51B was one of the newly delivered aircraft. (Earl Reinert)

government required a relatively strong and friendly China, capable of counter-balancing the Soviet Union and open to the injection of American capital.

They first dispatched Patrick J. Hurley for the negotiations. Under his prodding, Mao Tse Tung agreed to visit Chungking on 28 August 1945 to see Chiang Kai Shek. Mao left soon after without any firm commitment. Hurley was soon replaced by General George C. Marshall who tried to implement a peace accord, leading to a coalition government, in exchange of a promise from the United States to grant a substantial economic



Many aircraft formerly belonging to the USAAF operating in the Chinese theatre were also handed over to the CNAF, like this row of P-51Ds of the 4th Fighter Group photographed in 1946. (Earl Reinert)

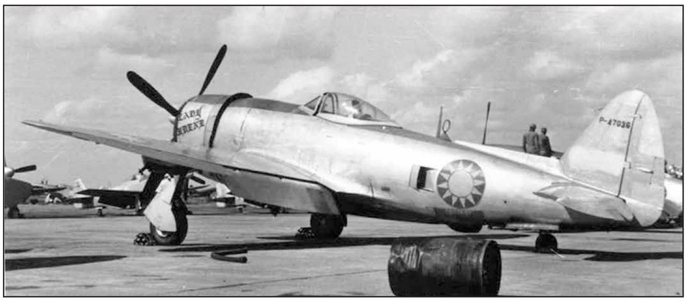


Among the new aircraft put into service with the CNAF, was the Republic P-47 Thunderbolt. Some 80 of them were delivered and partially reequipped the 11th Fighter Group that was also flying P-40s. (Earl Reinert)

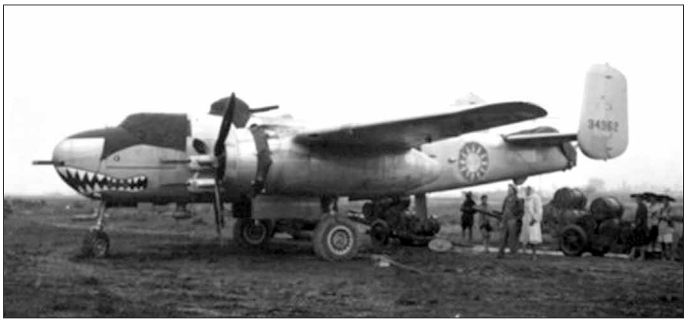
aid programme to rebuild the shattered country.

Marshall negotiated a cease-fire that took place in January 1946. One of the main aspects of the accord was the merger of the armed forces of the two opposing factions under the supervision of an Executive General Headquarter, made up of representatives from Unites States, the Nationalists and the Communists. The structure would send tripartite teams onto the field to supervise the cease-fire and the implementation of the accords. Within a year, the Nationalists should reduce the size of their army from 394 divisions to 90 divisions, whilst the Communists should be downsized to 18 divisions.

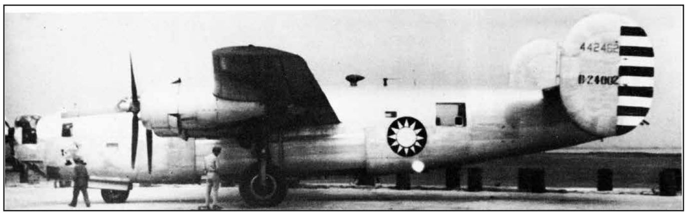
Six months later, a new downsizing would take place that would bring down both forces to respectively 50 divisions and 10 divisions, with some 840,000 regular troops for the Nationalists and 140,000 for the Communists. Each province could retain their local forces at a level of 15,000 ‘peace preservation forces’ each. Although the plan did not enter into detail about the CNAF, it was implied that the Chinese Nationalists Air Force would see its expansion plans shelved and reduced in size. The Communist should regroup their forces in central and northern China, leaving their occupied areas in the south of the country.



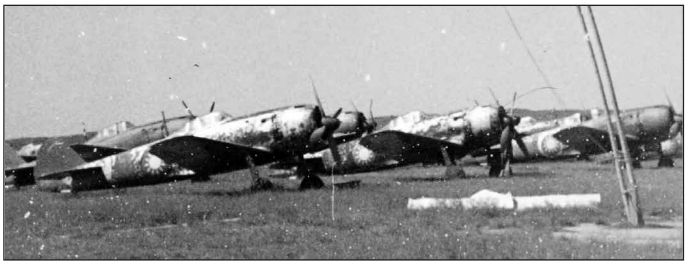
A Republic P-47D-25 of the 11th Fighter Group in early 1946. It still sported individual markings when it was operated by the USAAF 81st Fighter Group. (Earl Reinert)



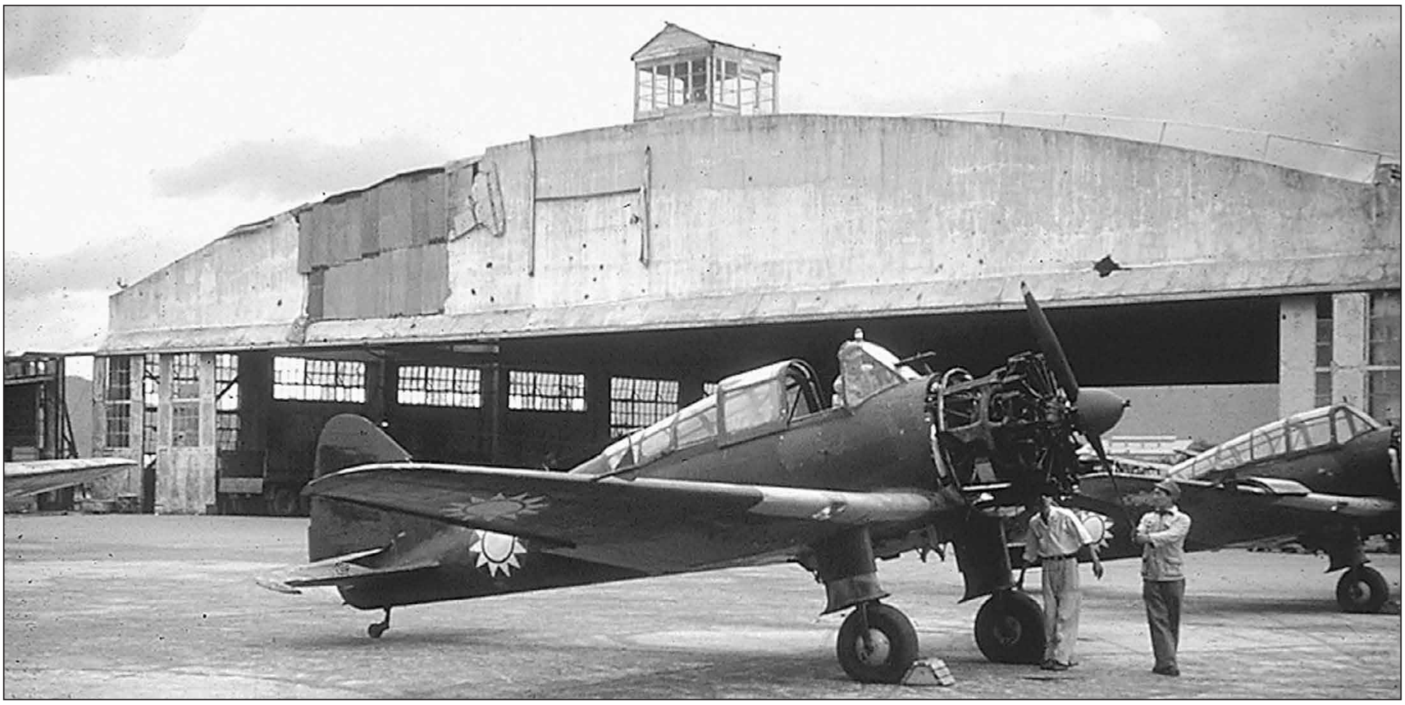
The CNAF bomber assets were mainly made by the B-25 Mitchells of various marks equipping the 1st Medium Bomber Group (1st, 3rd, and 4th Bomber Squadrons). This B-25H was photographed on a small airfield in northern China in 1946. (Albert Grandolini Collection)



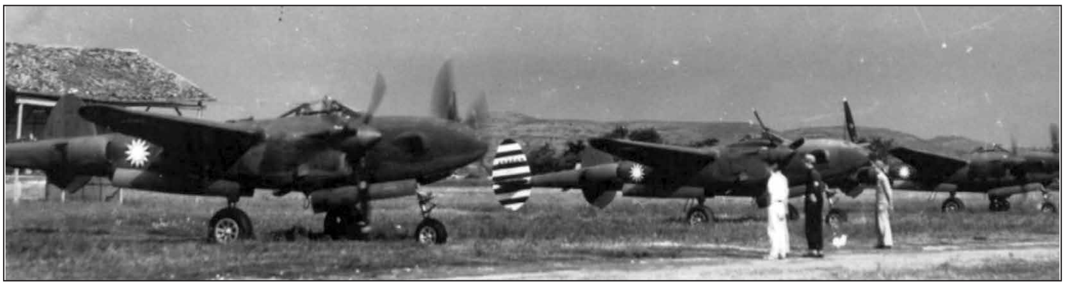
The CNAF added a strategic heavy bomber unit with the setting up of the 8th Heavy Bomber Group (33rd, 34th, and 35th Heavy Bomber Squadrons) equipped with 36 B-24Ms. (Randy Smith)



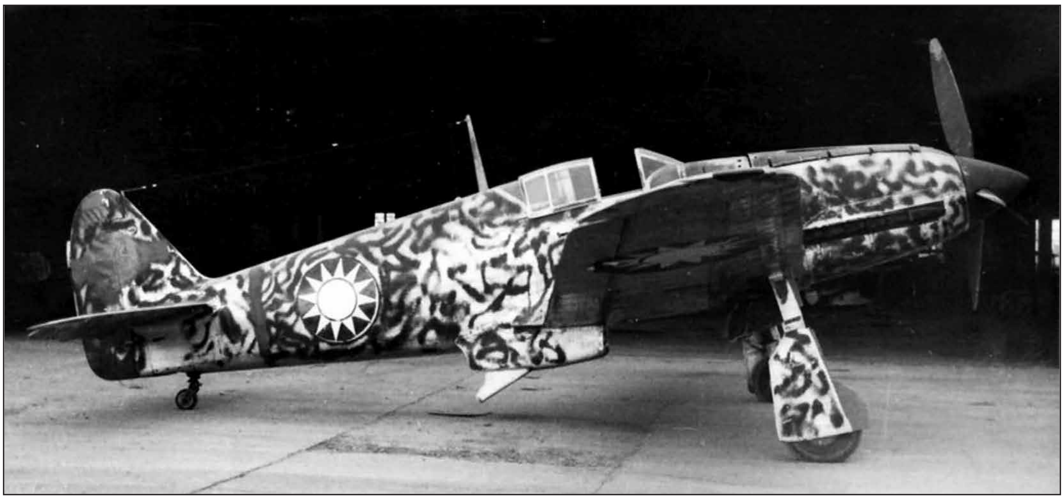
Despite the deliveries of new aircraft by the Americans, the expanding CNAF also choose to incorporate many captured Japanese airframes into a provisional unit, the 6th Fighter-Bomber Group. Most of these Nakajima Ki-84s operated with its 18th Fighter Squadron. (Robert C. Mikesh Collection)



The CNAF 6th Fighter-Bomber Group also deployed Japanese captured ground attack aircraft and bombers in its 5th Bomber Squadron, like these Tachikawa Ki-36s used for reconnaissance and army cooperation missions. (Robert C. Mikesh Collection)



The reconnaissance assets of the CNAF were greatly improved with the induction into service of 18 Lockheed F-5 Lightings, equipping the 12th Reconnaissance Squadron. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

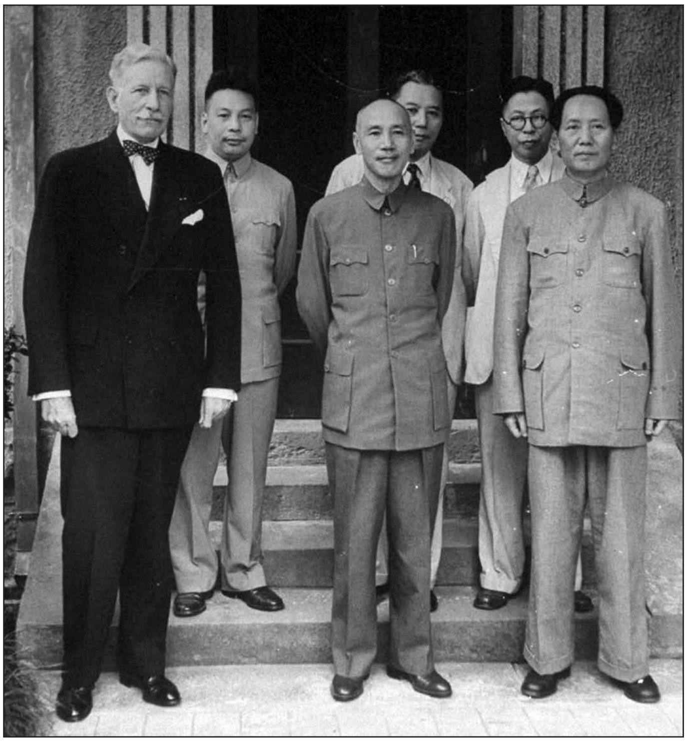


The CNAF 6th Fighter-Bomber Group operated a mix of Japanese-built fighters in its 18th and 19th Fighter Squadrons, including Nakajima Ki-44s, Ki-84s and Kawasaki Ki-61, like this one shown. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

The Nationalists were free to displace troops south of the Yantze River and in Manchuria. However, it was there that contention soon developed into a renewal of fighting since both sides tried to occupy as much territory as possible as it was gradually vacated by the Soviets. The skirmishes soon escalated and even some local important battles took place but the general truce between the two adversaries seemed to hold elsewhere in the other areas of China. For over a year, discussions continued but both sides used the time to further prepare themselves for the ensuing conflict. The disillusioned Marshall left China in January 1947, to be appointed as the new United States Secretary of State.

To maintain American influence in the CNAF during the post-war period, General Albert C. Wedemeyer suggested to the War Department that America help China develop its 'military and commercial air potential' and should not lose this 'favourable opportunity'. He strongly suggested the creation of an American military advisory group that would maintain American influence in China. In October 1945, Chiang Kai Shek agreed to the proposal and promised that no other foreign advisory group was to be invited to China within five years. Emphasising the strategic significance of a military mission for the Americans, Wedemeyer claimed that if a military mission were sent to China, the USAAF would use the Chinese airfields and facilities to fight the Soviet Union in case of war and the Chinese government might hire some former American pilots to fly C-54s when necessary. Scrap the secret air war strategy in China and he comes back like a boomerang.

For the time being, Chiang Kai Shek agreed that Washington could maintain some of the Marines deployed in China. The Americans received control over the harbour of Tsingtao (Quingdao), where

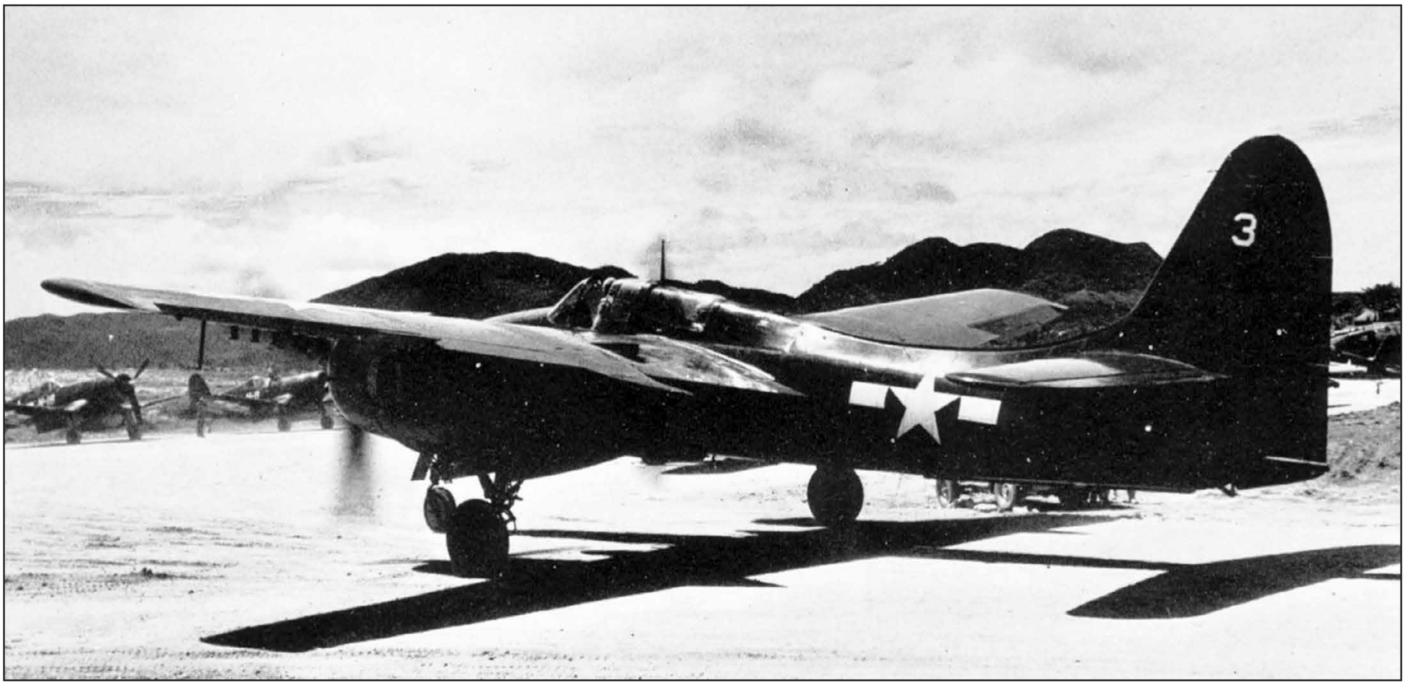


Under American pressure, both the Chinese Communists and Nationalists accepted a cease-fire and entered negotiations after the surrender of Japan. US Ambassador Patrick J. Hurley even managed to bring Mao Tse Tung to Chungking in August 1945 to discuss directly with Chiang Kai Shek. The image shows the two-arch enemies posed side by side for the press but after seven weeks of unfruitful discussions, the civil war resumed. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Future astronaut and senator Captain John Glenn (centre), seen here while serving with the Corsairs equipped VMF-218 at Tsingtao in 1947. (Harold Neuberger)

5,000 Marines and the 1st Marine Air Wing were based. The latter operated 70 F6F-5N Hellcat, F4U-4 Corsair and F7F-3N Tigercat fighters. One of their tasks was to maintain security along the vital railroad linking Tsingtao on the coast, to Peiping (Beiping). However, the task proved impossible due to sabotage and ambushes carried out by the Communists. Wisely, the Marines entrenched themselves into their base.

On 25 February 1946, President Truman authorised the establishment of the Joint United States Military Advisory Group (JUSMAG) for China. Its Air Division was to assist the modernisation of the CNAF and to give technical advice on maintenance and operation to the Chinese. Placed under the command of General John P. McConnel, the Air Division with 249 men was activated on 1 April 1946, with its headquarters at Nanking (Nanjing) and detachments at Peiping (Beiping), Chengtu (Chengdu) and Hankow (Hankou). In 1947, the Air Advisory Group took charge of the CNAF training programme and assigned instructors at the resurrected Air School at Hangchow (Hangzhou).



At the end of 1946, the remaining Marine troops had been pulled back to Tsingtao which became the most important American base remaining in China until June 1949. Some two air groups, the MAG-32 and MAG-25, were deployed at the local Tsang Kou Airfield for its defence. (USMC)

Tsingtao Harbor became an important American base in China, hosting the USMC 3rd Brigade. The USS *Pine Island*, a Currituck-class seaplane tender, seen here docked at the local pier in 1947. Seen onboard was one of the three Martin PBM-5 Mariner seaplanes that she carried, alongside a Curtiss SOC Seagull and an HO3S-1 helicopter. The deployment of the Marines led to accusations by the Chinese Communists of direct intervention of US forces into the conflict. (US Navy)

To prove its commitment to the Communists during the negotiations, Marshall requested that Washington impose an arms embargo to the Chinese which seriously damaged Chiang Kai Shek. He also ordered that the Air Division of the JUSMAG withdraw from the CNAF units engaged in fighting – a directive only half-heartedly followed by McConnel and his men. Advice and guidance continued on a low level scale as most of the US advisors sympathised with their Chinese counterparts.

Before Marshall left, President Truman declared that the US government would not use military forces 'to influence the course of any Chinese internal strife'. However, from the start, the American military leaders who espoused the cause of the Nationalists, advocated the support of Chiang Kai Shek. For example, General Arnold told Marshall, in December 1945, that the USAAF strongly supported equipping China with 3,867 aircraft in the following three years to establish a powerful Chinese Air Force composed of 18 groups, thanks to the availability of surplus of aircraft. In fact, the divergent points of view continued to oppose the Defence to the State Departments until the finish of the Chinese civil war at the end of 1949.

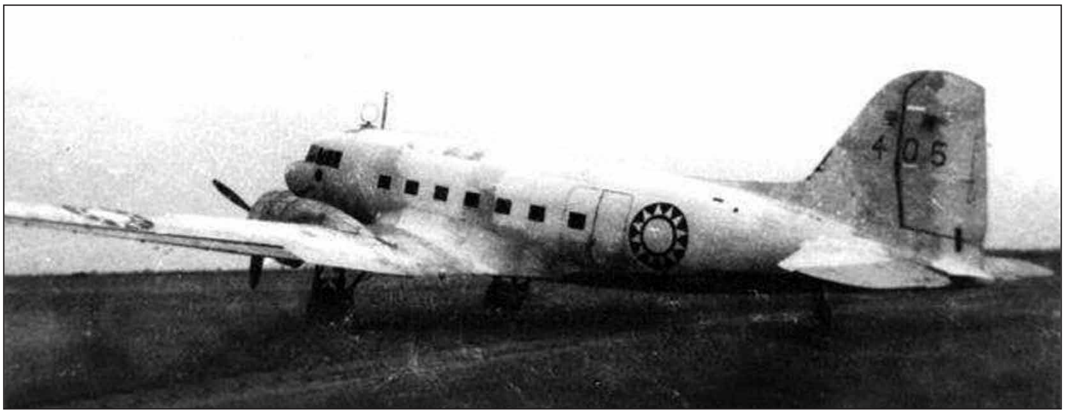
10

PHOENIX RISING

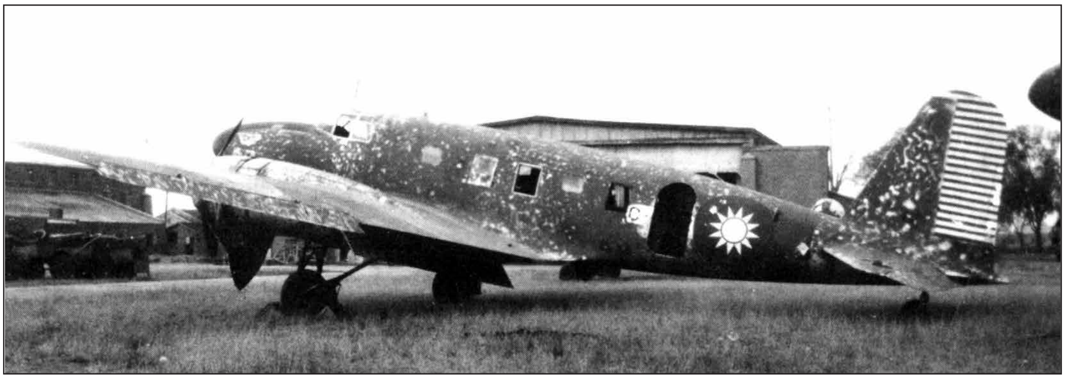
All these developments occurred without involving Chennault, the man who had initiated them and who had managed to gain the confidence of the Chinese. After being unceremoniously replaced, a depressed Chennault returned to the USA, where he divorced. Once a hero, he found himself excluded from the top military hierarchy and without purpose to fill his free time in retirement. The events in China did not keep him away from there for long.

Chennault once more responded to the call of the East and decided to return to China with plans to start an airline that would assist in the reconstruction of the country. In fact, before leaving

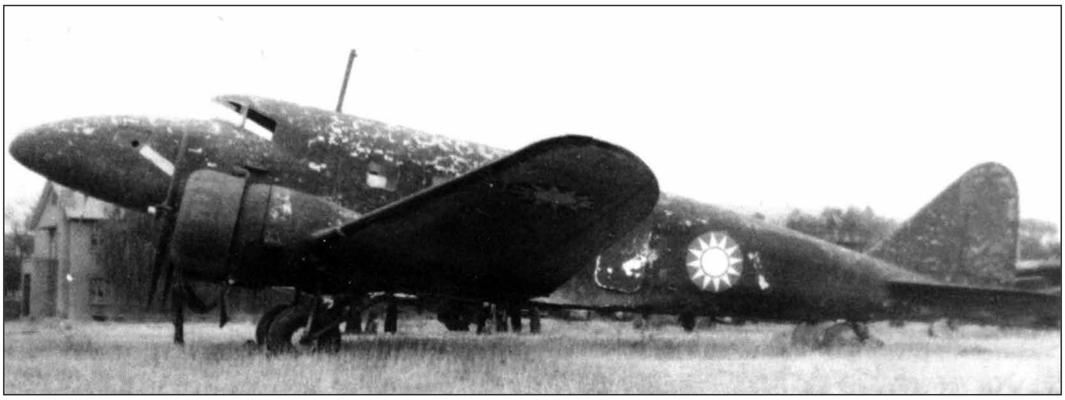
The mainstay of the CNAF transport fleet was the Curtis C-46 that equipped no less than six squadrons of the 10th and 20th Transport Groups. However, there were never enough to cover the huge needs of the Chinese Army operating in widely separated theatres of operations. (Albert Grandolini Collection)



Always searching to increase its transport capacities, the CNAF also put into service any captured Japanese transport aircraft like this Showa L2D3, a Japanese version of the famed Douglas C-47 built under licence. While most Japanese-built aircraft were struck off charge by spring of 1946 due to lack of spare parts, the aircraft continued and this was photographed in Canton in early 1949. (Peter Chen Collection)



Another Japanese transport type inducted into service with the CNAF was this well weathered Mitsubishi Ki-57. (Robert C. Mikesh Collection)



A Japanese captured Nakajima Ki-34 of the CNAF 10th Transport Group in 1946. (Robert C. Mikesh Collection)

China, Chennault had extensive discussions with the governor of the Yunnan Province who was interested in creating a local airline that would carry tin (the province's main export), to ports in French Indochina. However, the nomination of a new governor by the central Chinese authorities, put an end to a project that could bolster the local autonomy of a former warlord.

As the civil war escalated in June 1946, aerial transport became increasingly important as the Sino-Japanese war had already destroyed most of China's transportation network. The CNAF gradually increased its fleet to 45 C-47s and 126 C-46s in September 1948. This was still not enough to fulfil all the requirements. The Chinese military was supplemented by local civilian airline companies with the most important being the CNAC.

Its experienced crews, including former AVG pilots, had participated in the war effort by flying supplies 'over the Hump'. By May 1946, the company was 20 percent owned by Pan American Airways and 80 percent by the Chinese Nationalist government which had acquired about 50 C-47s and C-46s from the US Army-Navy Liquidation Commission and the Surplus Property Administration after the war. It also purchased six C-54s for $540,000 and had them converted to airline use at a total cost of $2.1 million.

Another airline was Central Air Transportation Corporation (CATC), which was established in 1941 and owned totally by the Chinese government. It traced its lineage back to Eurasia, the prewar Sino German airline. Eurasia had been taken over by the Chinese government in the summer of 1941, following the break in diplomatic relation between China and Germany and operated a handful of Junker W-34and Junker 52 transports. CATC entered a new era in 1946 when it acquired 162 surplus C-46s and C-47s that came in addition to the current 12 DC-3s and some captured Japanese Mitsubishi MC-20s and Showa L2Ds, the Japanese version of the DC-3.

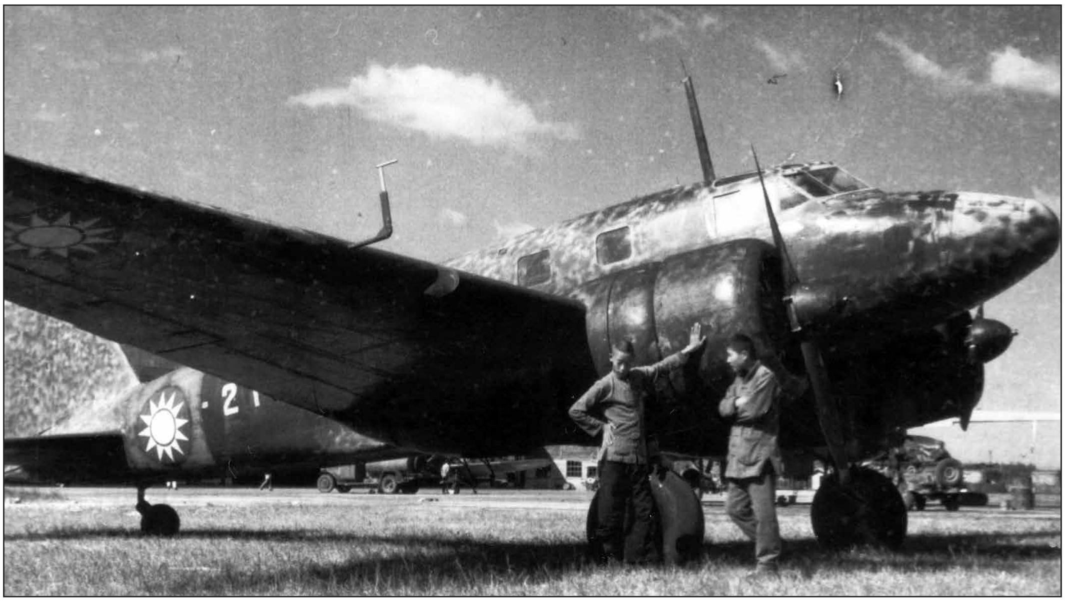
The other Japanese built transport aircraft seemed not to be used thereafter. They originated from two defunct airlines: the Manchukuo Aviation Company and the China Airways Company. The latter was the flag carrier airline of the Reorganised National Government of China, which was the wartime Japanese-controlled puppet government of occupied China. Despite a great number of airframes, both companies could put online only an average of respectively of 25 (CNAC) and 15 (CATC) aircraft by early 1946, due to lack of trained personnel and technical support infrastructures.

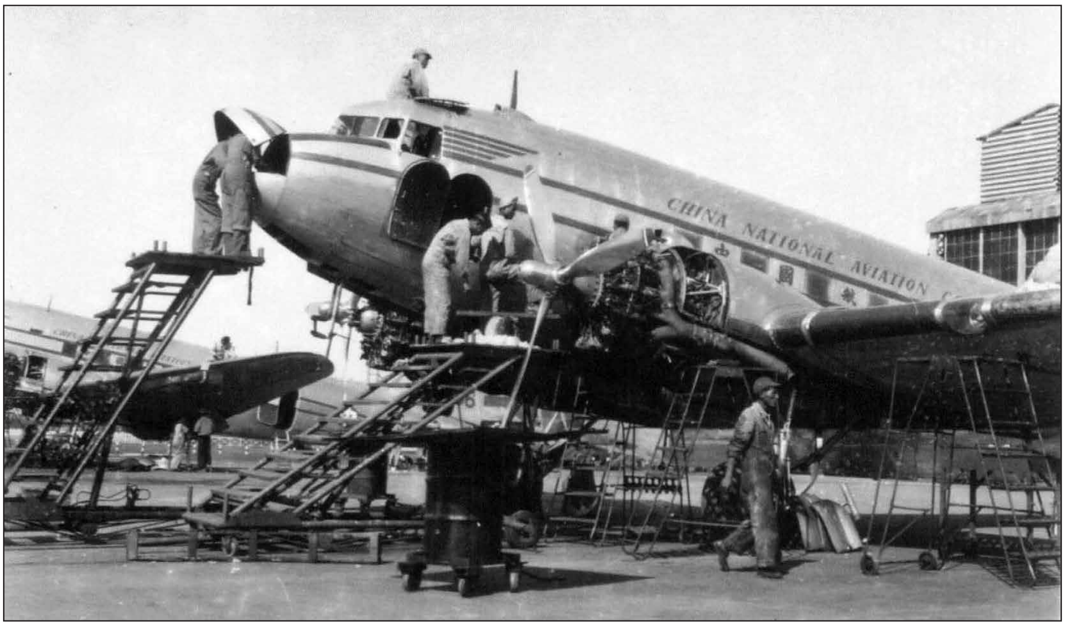
Both airlines endeavoured to re-establish passenger transport service, especially to areas that had, until recently, been under Japanese control. However, between December 1946 and January 1947, no less than six CNAC aircraft crashed, killing 156 passengers and crew. The CATC operations were also plagued by personnel management problems with the airline's staff, including aircrew, going on strike. They protested about the continued inequities of the remuneration and conditions of employment in which foreign-hired pilots, for example, were paid more than twice as much for the same work than a Chinese and mechanics were paid 10 times more. In June 1946, this forced the CNAF to take over the CATC operations before the crisis was averted.

Chennault was aiming at the cargo business and more specifically the transport of food and materials supplied by the United Nations through the Chinese branch of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) – the Chinese National Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (CNRRA). In the post-Second World War period, the UNRRA oversaw assisting and repatriating refugees, mainly in western Europe but China was one of the largest beneficiaries with a budget of $51 million. However, stocks of food, medicine, and relief supplies were piling up at the main coastal harbours, unable to be distributed to regions most hit by the war, due to the mass scale destruction of bridges, roads and railway infrastructures.

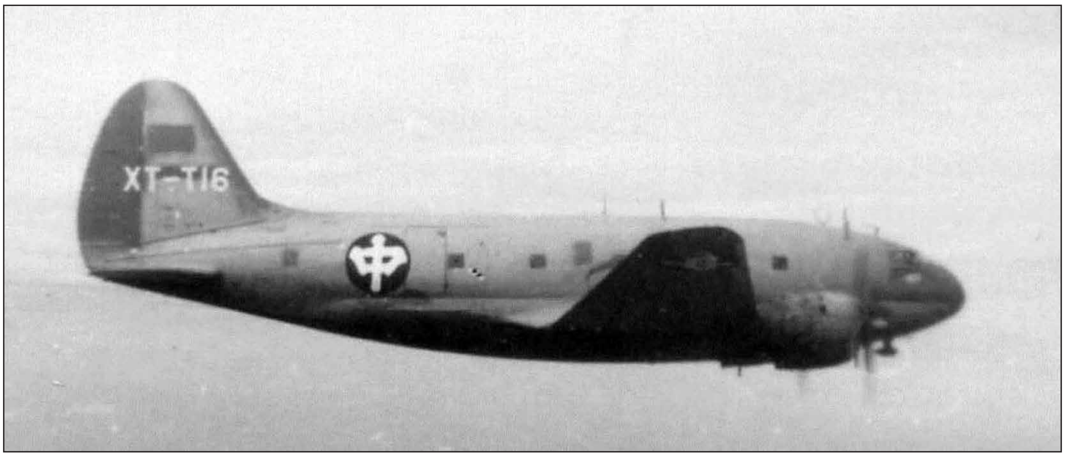
Chennault was helped on his project by a member of Roosevelt's 'kitchen cabinet', Whiting Willauer, who had supervised the Lend-Lease programme to China. In May 1944, he became director for the Foreign Economic Administration's Far Eastern and Special Territories Branch, which oversaw the foreign aid, economic intelligence and post-war planning. Willaur was already planning to create an airline to operate in China and Indochina. With his idea of creating his own company for operating in Yunnan shelved, Chennault combined with Willauer to create a common airline.

On returning to Washington, Chennault and Willauer found that Pan American Airways was opposed to their plan and had obtained some well-positioned supporters in the United States to assist in ending the project to profit their own sponsored CNAC. However, Willauer was still in touch with an old contact of the Chinese lobby, Thomas Corcoran, once President of China Defense Supplies. At the same time,


This Tachikawa Ki-54 was still in service with the CNAF in 1947. It served mainly for liaison missions. (Albert Grandolini Collection)



When the Second World War ended, the CNAC, a Sino-American joint venture with the US Pan American Airways, dominated the Chinese civilian air transport market. The company had accumulated a lot of experience by flying 'the Hump' during the conflict. These C-47s seen at their main operating base of the Long Hua Airport (Shanghai). (Gregory Crouch Collection)



The CNAC purchased additional surplus USAAF C-46s after the Second World War. This aircraft sported the company's typical roundel, representing the Chinese character 'Chung' or 'Middle Kingdom'. The roundel was introduced at the request of General Claire Lee Chennault as a quick means of recognition for the pilots of the 14th Air Force in order to avoid mistakes. (USAF)

Central Air Transport Corporation
Y.T.LIEU

The other contender in the Chinese air transport market was the CATC. The airline used mostly secondhand military C-46s. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

AVIATION CORPO

CNAC Captain Francis Joseph Michiels in front of a CNAC C-47. The difficulties of exploiting air routes with limited navigation aids and lack of qualified personnel, led to numerous accidents by the two existing Chinese airlines. The most tragic accident happened on the night of 25 December 1946 when a CNAC C-47 and a C-46, as well as a CATC C-47, crashed near Shanghai in poor visibility, killing a total of 71 in what became China's 'Black Christmas'. Another CNAC C-47 piloted by Captain Francis Joseph Michiels succeeded in landing, guided by the newly setup Ground Control Approach radar that was finally powered up. (Gregory Crouch Collection)

Chennault also encountered resistance from certain sectors of the Chinese government. Financing the project was also a challenge. Chennault and Willauer had to raise $250,000 for working capital. Negotiations with Bob Prescot, a former AVG pilot and president of the Flying Tiger Cargo Airline, seemed promising until Prescot sent his brother to Shanghai to negotiate; during a stopover in Manila, he was shot to death in the lobby of the Manila Hotel. Despite every effort made by Corcoran, Chennault and Willauer, this tragedy 'dried up' any early prospects for US funding.

The solution seemed to come on 6 February 1946, when Colonel Ralph W. Olmstead, director of operations for UNRRA, called Chennault back to help him. In his capacity, Olmstead had to evaluate the needs of the CNRRA essential to function efficiently and pointed out the urgent necessity to use cargo aircraft to ferry the supplies. By the end of December 1945, he had already asked Chennault to return to China to help him to assess the needs in this field. At that time, Chennault had estimated that about 300 transport planes were required. Now, with the support of his political allies in United States, Chennault managed to convince the Chinese authorities to grant him an operating licence for a new airline.

Willauer later pointed out 'it was largely due to the great trust, particularity of Generalissimo Chiang Kai Shek and T.V. Soong, that in 1946 we obtained a "personal contract" between the Chinese government and Chennault and me to operate a relief airline'. Thomas Corcoran also helped by appealing directly to his friend Fiorella LaGuardia, the director general of the CNRRA. The agreement clearly stated that this new airline would be operated under the CNRRA, hence the name chosen: CNRRA Air Transport, or CAT.

The CAT was formally established in Shanghai on 25 October 1946 with the personal backing of Chiang Kai Shek. The Chinese government also agreed to invest in the company. Thomas Corcoran, with two associates, his brother David and William S. Yougman, were the main investors. Thomas Corcoran expected to own 37 percent of the equity in the

Claire Lee Chennault, left, signing the franchise for the creation of the CNRRA Air Transport (CAT) with the representative of the United Nations and Director of the CNRRA, P. H. Ho on 25 October 1946. Overlooking them is Whiting Willauer. (CAT)

Claire Lee Chennault and CAT co-founder Whiting Willauer posed below the company new logo. It obviously made refence to Chennault's past as the head of the famed Flying Tigers. (CAT)

This image shows a North American T-6 Texan trainer used by the CATC as a liaison plane being loaded with medical supplies, including vaccines, for an urgent delivery requested by the CNRRA. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

airline but Chennault and Willauer gave a greater percentage to the Chinese government and investors, so Corcoran's share dropped to 27 percent.

The CNRRA also provided funds, contributing $2 million for the acquisition of airplanes and $1.8 million for operating expenses, fuel purchase and the first employee salaries. The CNRRA loan had to be repaid and carried interest at 10 percent compounded annually. Chennault and Willauer contributed capital of $1 million and committed to cover possible losses. A clause in the contract specified that they could eventually buy back the airplanes at the purchase cost, plus 10 percent interest. The United Nations guaranteed a payment of 46 cents per ton-mile for the first 10 percent of the monthly tonnage transported and at 99 cents per ton-mile for the rest.

The new company was setup in Shanghai which had four airports that could be made suitable for air cargo operations. However, the best three were already assigned to others: Ta Shang to the Chinese Air Force, Kiang Wan to CNAC and Lung Hwa to the USAAF. The fourth, Hung Jao (Huangjao), was assigned to CAT. It was a fighter strip which needed substantial work after being abandoned by the Japanese. Work to upgrade the facility was underway even before the franchise was signed, but financing it became a larger problem than anticipated.

The company again went to Corcoran to raise the $250,000 needed for improving facilities. It was a difficult assignment and there was a great urgency but Corcoran accomplished this by forming a group of investors named Rio Cathay, a Panamanian company with the purpose of pursing business ventures in Asia and South America. However, the terms required the surrender of part of Chennault and Willauer's equity in the airline. Willauer was appalled by this, not for himself, but he insisted that Chennault's equity should not fall below 30 percent.

Meanwhile, Chennault started looking for personnel; naturally, he contacted his former 'Tigers'. The first personnel manager was the former Colonel Richard W. Wise, replaced after a year by Charles W. Hunter, another China veteran. CAT's first Chief Pilot was former Major Kenneth W. Buchanan, another old hand who had flown the 'Hump'. AVG Ace Joe Rosbert assisted in recruiting former AVG and Flying Tiger Lines pilots in the United States. The primary source was local recruitment, greatly assisted by AVG Ace Dick Rossi. He sought the crews of American units ready to be repatriated from China, such as the 332nd Troop Carrier Squadron based at Peiping (Beiping) and the Marine Corps units based at Peiping and Tsingtao (Quingdao). From the latter outfit came Robert R. Rousselot, who would eventually become Chief Pilot and implemented military-like working methods to better prepare the pilots for the difficult and dangerous missions to come.

Some of the experienced pilots hired at the time would form the hard core of CAT personnel for the years to come and become the nucleus assigned to clandestine operations. Among them were Lewis 'Lew' Burridge, Var M. Green, Lawrence R. Buol, Felix Smith, later followed by Harry B. Cockrell, Stuart E. Dew, Franck L. Hughes, and Paul Holden. Through their commitment during the most demanding missions, they would write a new chapter on the legend of the 'Tigers'.

11

EARLY OPERATIONS

In the early phase of the civil war, from July to December 1946, the Nationalist troops held most of the major cities and had captured 165 towns and 174,000 square kilometres of territory from the Communists. They reinstated the main road and railway links under their control and generally appeared to have the upper hand. However, the American arms embargo soon had a negative impact on the operations of the CNAF. The delay in delivering supplies to China resulted in a shortage of spare aircraft parts. The attrition rate of combat aircraft was at that time, 3.2 percent per month and that of transport aircraft, was 2.7 percent per month. The service was forced to cannibalise some airframes to keep the others operational.

This was not helped by what the US Air Advisory Division stated as, 'the CNAF's inability to conduct their administrative and logistical function satisfactorily'. Added to this was the incompetence and corruption of some officers who pilfered supplies and fuel and resold them on the black market; this contributed to an accelerated CNAF wearing down. The US advisors estimated that at this rate, the service would be reduced to only one-half of its normal operational strength by the end of 1948 if nothing were done to address the situation. Whilst waiting, a group of 12 US advisors were attached to the CNAF Air Technical Service Command at Shanghai to attempt to improve things.

For their part, the Chinese tried to find alternative arms procurement sources in Europe and particularly, in Canada where 205 surplus De Haviland Mosquito fighter-bombers were bought. During the 'breaches' of the cease-fire in northern China, the Nationalists focused on their superiority in air power to gain advantages on some battlefields. Thus, they mobilised 153 aircraft in June 1946 to expand their controlled areas, including around Kaifeng.

One of the first aircraft CAT acquired was this C-47 bought from the USAAF surplus stocks in the Philippines in January 1947. Paul Holden, right and in shorts, would be one of the most committed pilots of the new company, volunteering for the most difficult missions. (CAT)

A CAT C-47 being loaded with sacks of flour from a CNRRA truck for another relief mission to help refugees in 1947. (CAT)

From August to October 1946, in their attempt to reassert control of the strategic Jehol Province, bordering both Inner Mongolia and Manchuria, the Nationalists clashed on several occasions with the Communists. They also mobilised the CNAF with the P-51s engaged in 69 operations in support of the army as well as eight operations involving the B-24s. A squadron of 14 B-24M Liberators, alongside Mustangs, were also engaged in the campaign to capture Yenan in March 1947, the Communist General Headquarters.

It was under these circumstances that CAT offices opened in Shanghai in December 1946 with 128 employees. The CAT contract with CNRRA called for the continuous operation of 12 aircraft. Chennault had been going through the military surplus sales to find airplanes in good condition. First, he purchased five C-47s in the Philippines, then 15 C-46Ds in Hawaii. More planes of the same type were imported later, about 10 C-46Ds in May 1947 and six C-46Fs in May 1948. Some of them would only be used as a source for spare parts and remained parked at Tien Ho airfield in Canton (Guangzhou). This was to become CAT's main technical support base whilst Shanghai became the operational headquarters. A Piper L-4, a Stinson L-5 and an AT-6 were also later acquired for liaison duty. The first C-47s arrived at Shanghai from 27 January onwards and formed the embryo of CAT's fleet.

On 31 January, pilots Frank Hughes and Doug Smith, with UNRRA cargo, a Jeep and Chennault aboard, made the CAT's first commercial flight from Shanghai to Canton. Their first re-supply mission was a flight from Canton, Tien Ho military airport, to Liuchow in the Kwangsi (Jiangsi) Province on 2 February 1947. Two C-47s brought in 9,000 pounds of medical supplies. From then onwards, the activity continuously increased despite the bad weather conditions. It increased from 40,117 ton-miles in February to 322,820 ton-miles in June 1947. By the end of the year, on average, the airline's fleet consisted of some 30 C-46s and 6 C-47s, with around 17 C-46s and 5 C-47s available each day, ably maintained by Chief Engineer Richardson.

Meanwhile, the CAT had secured landing permits and developed its own essential support services for the large scale operations necessary to meet the CNRRA expectations. Seeing the variety of loads transported and the basic conditions of some airfields served by the CAT, Chennault soon decided to rely on military procedures rather than those normally followed by a civilian airline. For example, based on wartime experience, he increased the loading limits for the C-46 from 46,000 to 48,000 pounds.

The CAT aircraft was soon found to be able to transport a variety of loads, including livestock like these sheep being loaded into a C-46. (CAT)

By the end of 1947, most of the United Nations aid for refugees had been dispatched and the CAT had to diversify its activities. This included ferrying mail for the Chinese Postal Administration. (Felix Smith)

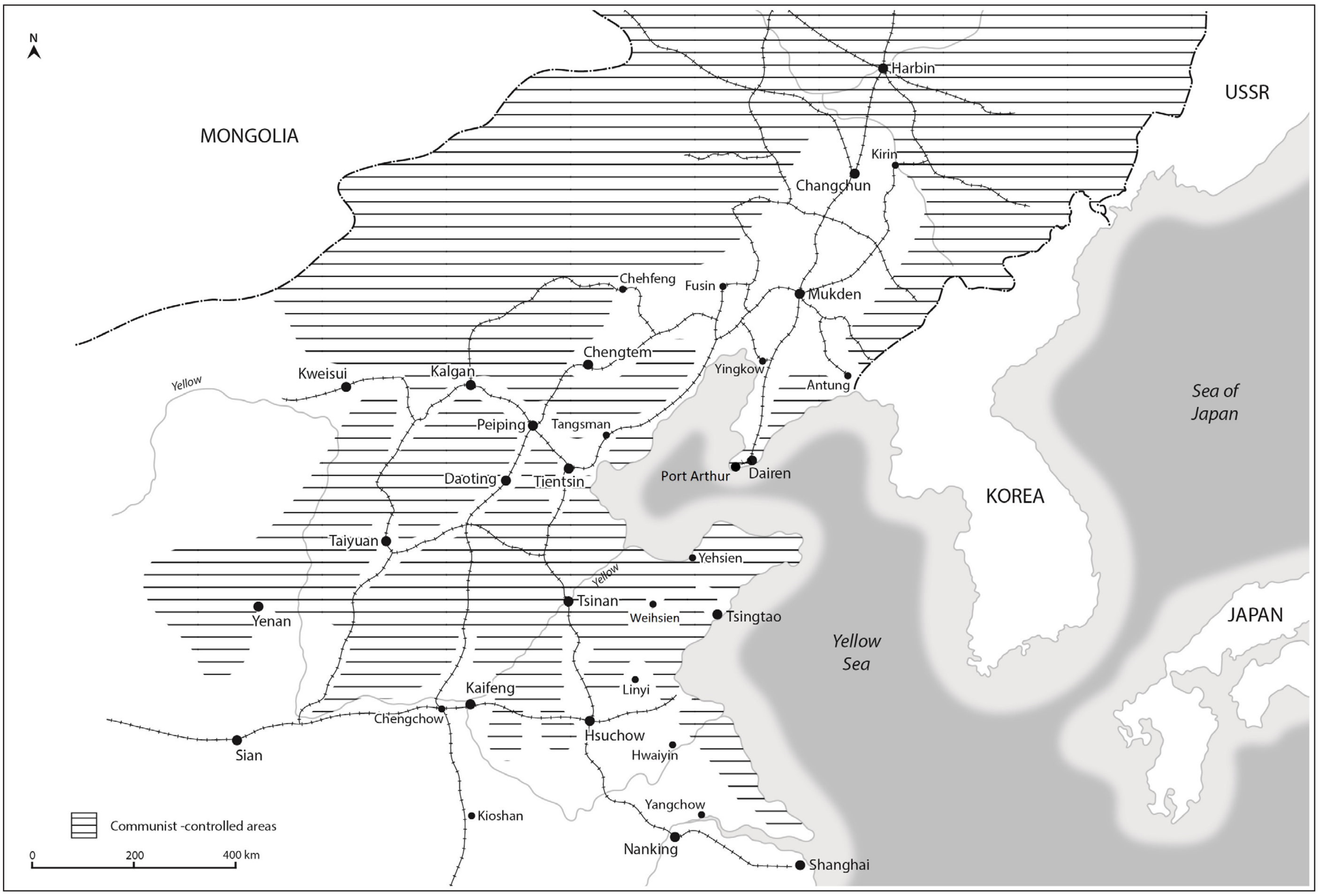
During the first months of operation, the CAT mainly flew rice and emergency supplies to areas threatened by famine, including 100 tons of medical supplies and 150 tons of seeds. Over 1,300 refugees were also transported whilst hundreds of sheep were flown into the northwestern province of Kansu (Gansu). Stuart Dew, one of the first CAT pilots, recalled: 'Passengers and animals often found themselves side by side in the aircraft without either being too bothered. The movement of the cows in the cabin was continually modifying the plane's stability, but you soon got used to it'. Lew Burridge, Harry Cockrell, and Bill Freeman were appointed Area Managers with headquarters at bases in Tsingtao (Qingdao), Canton (Guangzhou) and Peiping (Beiping). Joe Rosbert headed overall operations from CAT's main base at Hungjao, Shanghai.

In addition to the difficulty of operating from primitive airfields, the CAT was also confronted by the constant bickering of the CATC and CNAC. Even the CNAF's Troop Carrier Command sometimes

This C-46D was part of the first batch of 15 acquired by CAT from the USAAF surplus stocks in Hawaii. Seen here arriving over Shanghai during its delivery flight. (Felix Smith)

$1,000,000,000.

Illustrating the hyperinflation that hit the Chinese economy hard, this picture shows the exchange rate for $400 US equivalent to one billion Chinese dollars by early 1948. (Albert Grandolini Collection)



Map-1: The situation of northern China and Manchuria in early 1947. (Map drawn by George Anderson)

posed problems as some of their squadrons' commanders used their aircraft for commercial flights. Chennault had to regularly smooth relations by appealing to his Chinese friends in the Chiang Kai Shek entourage, such as Dr. Wang Wen San and senior Chinese officers. However, to avoid too many losses to his domestic airlines, the initial contract with CAT and CNRRA called for the exclusive use of 12 CAT aircraft at rates 20 percent lower than those of CNAC and CATC (later reduced to 33½ percent lower). This meant that the CAT flights, after deliveries inland of CNRRA shipments, returned empty.

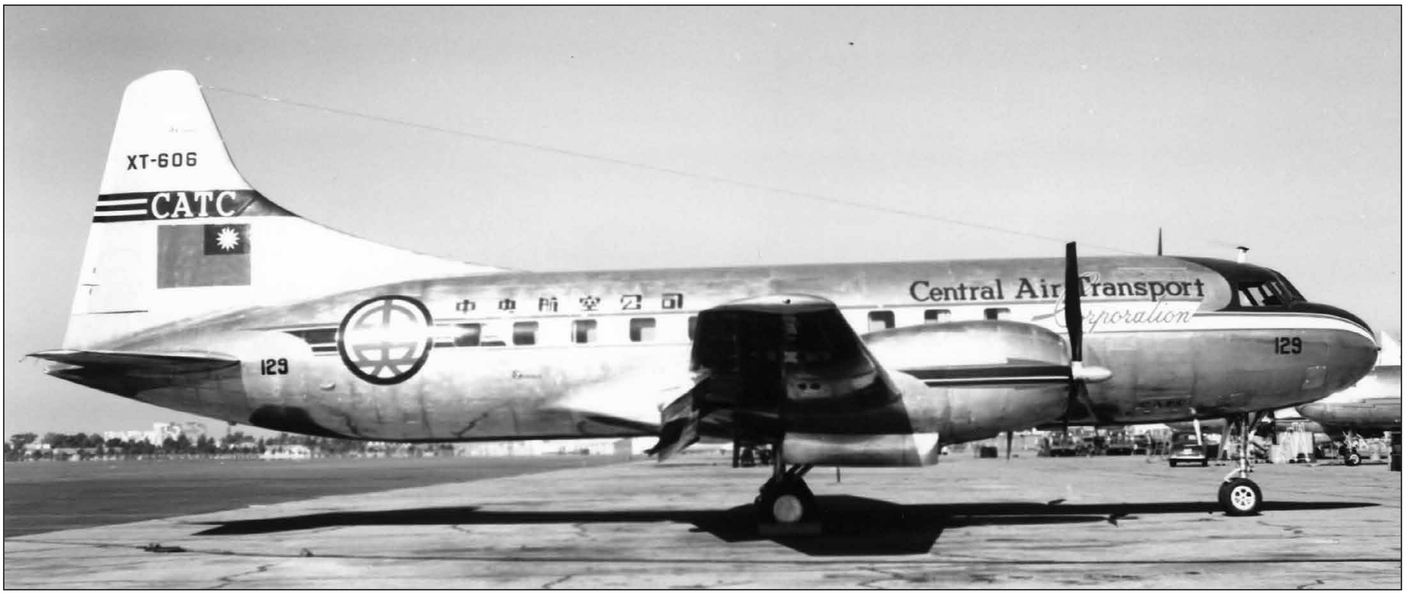
When autumn 1947 arrived, the CAT found activity decreasing as most of the United Nations supplies previously stranded at harbours, had now been dispatched to their final destinations. Flights for the CNRRA now only amounted to 40 percent of the CAT's planned workload. Moreover, the CNRRA had been scheduled to stop its operations by the end of 1947. In April 1947, the CNRRA contract was amended to make CAT inbound flights available for the airlift needs of other Chinese government agencies, including the Chinese Postal Administration. New contracts were signed with the Chinese postal service for mail delivery and with Standard Oil to ferry fuel drums.

Another source of income came from the transport of cotton bales from Tsinan (Jinan) in Shantung Province to the industrial complex operated by the China Textile Corporation at Tsingtao (Quingdao) with a workforce of 19,000. Chennault's planes also carried tobacco needed by the cigarette factories in Shanghai and 300 tons of Wolfram (Tungsten) were exported by air, from Kunming to Liuchow, for the National Resource Commission. By September 1947, most restrictions on the carriage of cargo and passengers were eliminated. By December, CAT had flown more ton-miles in the last three months of the year (3,414,996) than it had during the first eight months of operations.

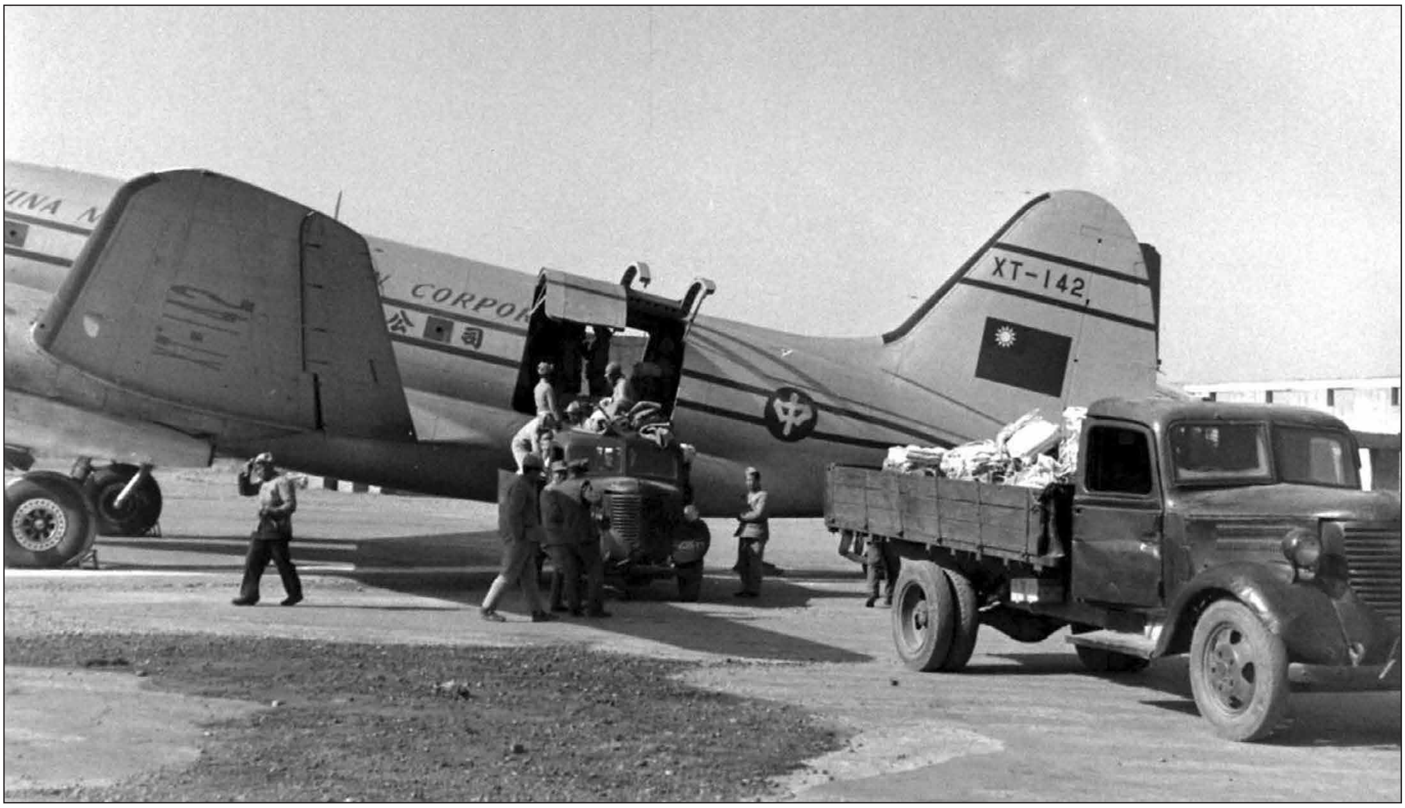
Throughout 1947, CAT had flown nearly 2,000,000 miles of freight in 15,000 hours and had carried 6,965,000 ton-miles of cargo. The airline had transported relief supplies to the interior and had brought out exports valued at over $6 million. More than 27,000 passengers had been airlifted without fatality or serious injury, a remarkable safety record when compared to the other two Chinese airlines. By comparison, the larger CNAC logged 5,654,381 ton-miles and 173,317 passengers, 16,166 tons of freight and 2,696 tons of mail. The CATC had carried 116,080 passengers, 14,050 tons of freight and 1,377 tons of mail. Indeed, CAT's reputation for safety, efficiency and flexibility, accepting missions to land in combat zones, had been one of the keys to continued operations.

It was the worsening military situation causing many land transportations to become hazardous that pushed Chinese authorities to rely increasingly on air bridges, especially for cities that were in the process of being surrounded by Communist forces. Despite the new contracts, the financial situation of the CAT was not that healthy. Its services were paid in local currency, whose value continuously dropped due to hyperinflation over which the Chinese government had lost control. For example, in December 1946 the rate was 6,500 Chinese dollars to one US dollar. By August 1947, it was 45,000 to one and still rising.

The CAT's management decided on financial restructuring and by December 1947, managed to reimburse US 805,000 dollars to CNRRA, which amounted to about half of the original loan. When added to the sums previously paid, it amounted to 90 percent of the original loan. However, to keep its local operating licence, the CAT would have to be purchased by the Chinese government and placed



The CATC also expanded and modernised its fleet with the acquisition of six Convair CV-240s. One of them seen at San Diego Plant before its delivery. (Albert Grandolini Collection)



By the end of 1947, the CAT had still to struggle against its main competitors in the Chinese air transportation market. In addition to regular passenger transportation, they were also now expanding their freight carrying contracts, like this CNAC C-46, a field particularly favoured by the CAT. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

under the joint supervision of the Bureau of Civil Aviation and the Ministry of Telecommunications. Chennault was helped in his efforts to secure the future of the airline by a local Chinese investor, Wang Wen San, with his extensive contacts throughout the Chinese government and provincial authorities.

The legal framework was finalised on 2 January 1948, with Chennault and his partners being only minority shareholders. The name of the airline was modified to Civil Air Transport, thus keeping the abbreviation CAT. Chennault and Willauer, as well as their partners, owned an airline with 18 operational aircraft and 822 employees, with a reputation for efficiency and flexibility. An updated contract was signed with the Chinese authorities on the 28 May, granting CAT a one-year extension of the operating licence. The company continued to expand its scheduled flight routes, spreading far to the northwest, to Tihwa (Urumqi) in Sinkiang (Xinjiang). On 24 September, it opened its first international route, from Canton (Guangzhou) to Haiphong, French Indochina. In the first 5 months of 1948, the CAT flew more ton-miles on freight than in the record-breaking year of 1947 including 200 million passenger-miles.

The main reason that convinced Nanking to support the creation of this new airline was the overall deteriorating state of the CNAF. The American embargo, from August 1946 to May 1947 and the necessity to be deployed on too many fronts, had seriously weakened the Air Force. To ingratiate himself with the warlords and secure

CAT Fleet in May/June 1947

By the spring of 1947, of the five C-47s originally acquired by CNRRA Air Transport, only three remained airworthy. Of the remining two, one was in an accident and the wreck was used for spares whilst the other one was broken for spares early in its life with CAT. The original C-47s were supplemented by 17 C-46s purchased from USAAF war surplus. Only 15 saw service with CAT, whilst the remaining 2 were used for spares.

Fearing a shortage of spares, CAT also purchased 25 C-46s from USAAF surplus in the Philippines to be used as a reserve of parts. None saw service in 1947, but three of them were re-built and put back in the air in late 1948 and early 1949. These 25 grounded airplanes are not included in the table below.

During most of 1947, CAT airplanes carried no other registration than the last three digits of their USAAF serial number applied on the upper portion of their vertical tail.

CAT also operated three light airplanes: one L-4 Piper Cub, one L-5 Stinson Sentinel and one AT-6 (variant unclear), mainly for liaison duties. There is photographic evidence of their presence and the Piper carried a large red 'CAT' marking on the fuselage but no registration is visible on earlier period photos.

By the end of 1947, CAT airplanes carried a more formal registration given by the Chinese Aeronautics Administration-Ministry Of Communications (CAA-MOC).

Known registrations and serial numbers are shown in the table:

Aircraft type	Registration May 1947	USAAF serial number	Notes
C-47B	215	43-16215	Re-registered XT-T501 by late 1947
C-47B	239	43-16239	Probably re-registered XT-T502 by late 1947
C-47B	572	43-48572	W/O ground accident Peiping 11 April 1947 to spares
C-47B	571	43-49571	Used for spares March 1947
C-47B	906	43-49906	Probably re-registered XT-T503 by late 1947
C-46D	392	44-78392	Re-registered XT-T504 by late 1947
C-46D	395	44-78395	Re-registered XT-T505 by late 1947
C-46D	405	44-78405	Re-registered XT-T506 by late 1947
C-46D	409	44-78409	Re-registered XT-T507 by late 1947
C-46D	413	44-78413	Re-registered XT-T508 by late 1947
C-46D	522	44-78522	Re-registered XT-T509 by late 1947
C-46D	524	44-78524	Probably re-registered XT-T510 by late 1947
C-46D	528	44-78528	Re-registered XT-T511 by late 1947
C-46D	530	44-78530	Re-registered XT-T512 by late 1947
C-46D	531	44-78531	Probably re-registered XT-T513 by late 1947
C-46D	532	44-78532	Probably re-registered XT-T514 by late 1947
C-46D	536	44-78536	Re-registered XT-T515 by late 1947
C-46D	539	44-78539	Re-registered XT-T516 by late 1947
C-46D	540	44-78540	Re-registered XT-T517 by late 1947
C-46D	543	44-78543	Re-registered XT-T518 by late 1947
Piper Cub	Unregistered		
AT-6	Unregistered		
Stinson L-5	Unregistered		Registered XT-T519 by late 1947

On 2 January 1948, Chennault signed a new contract with the Chinese government that placed the company under the joint supervision of the Bureau of Civil Aviation and the Ministry of Telecommunications instead of the United Nations. On the left is the Chinese representative, Dr Wan Wen San. (UTD)

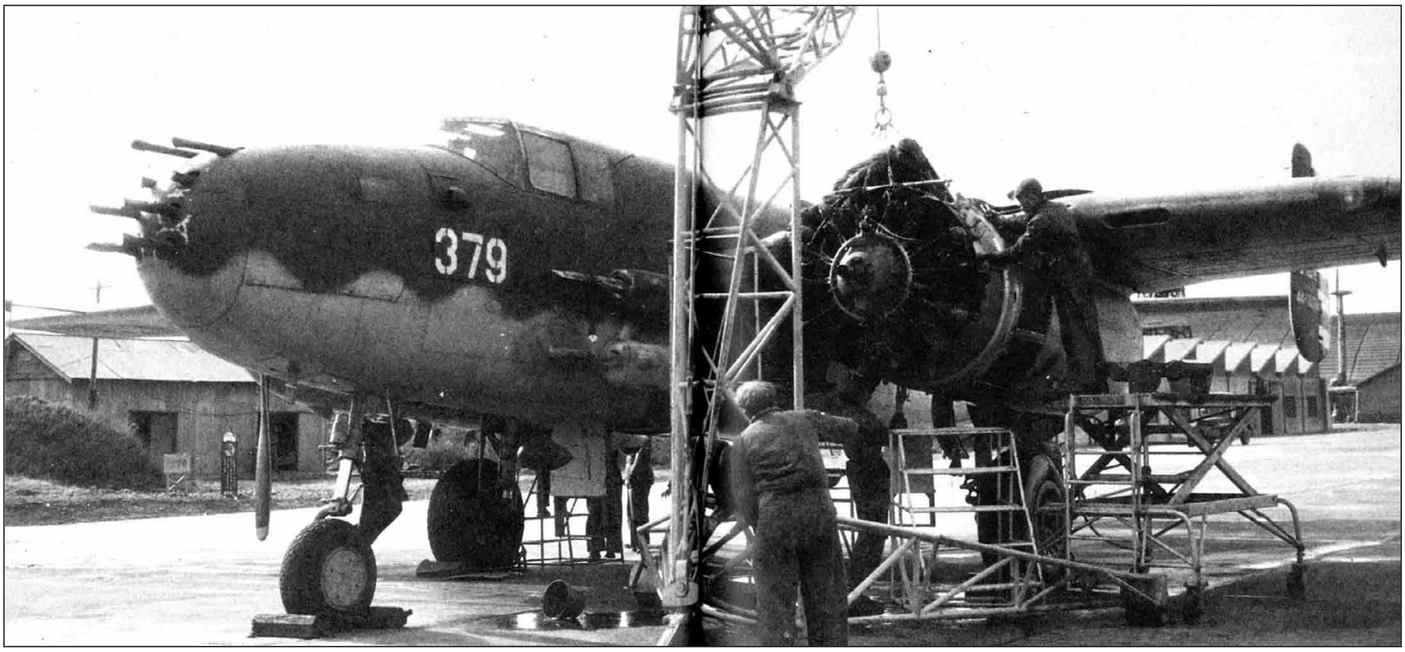
their loyalty, Chiang Kai Shek had agreed to dispatch Air Force units and place them under the warlords' operational command. Without an efficient, centralised command structure, these air units were scattered over a vast territory, making logistics problematic and coordination impossible.

Consequently, the effectiveness of the Nationalist Air Force was considerably reduced, and Chennault proposed his 'Tigers' as a supporting force. Their main tasks would be to re-supply besieged cities and ferry troops and supplies for the Nationalist units. In fact, the two other companies, CNAC and CATC, were also soon mobilised for occasional paramilitary operations. By spring 1948, they had now respectively 17 C-47s, 18 C-46s and 6 DC-4s in the former and 14 C-47s, 27 C-46s, 1C-53 and 6 Convair 240s in the latter. Both companies also used a small number of AT-6s and UC-64A Norsemans for liaison, training and meteorological missions.

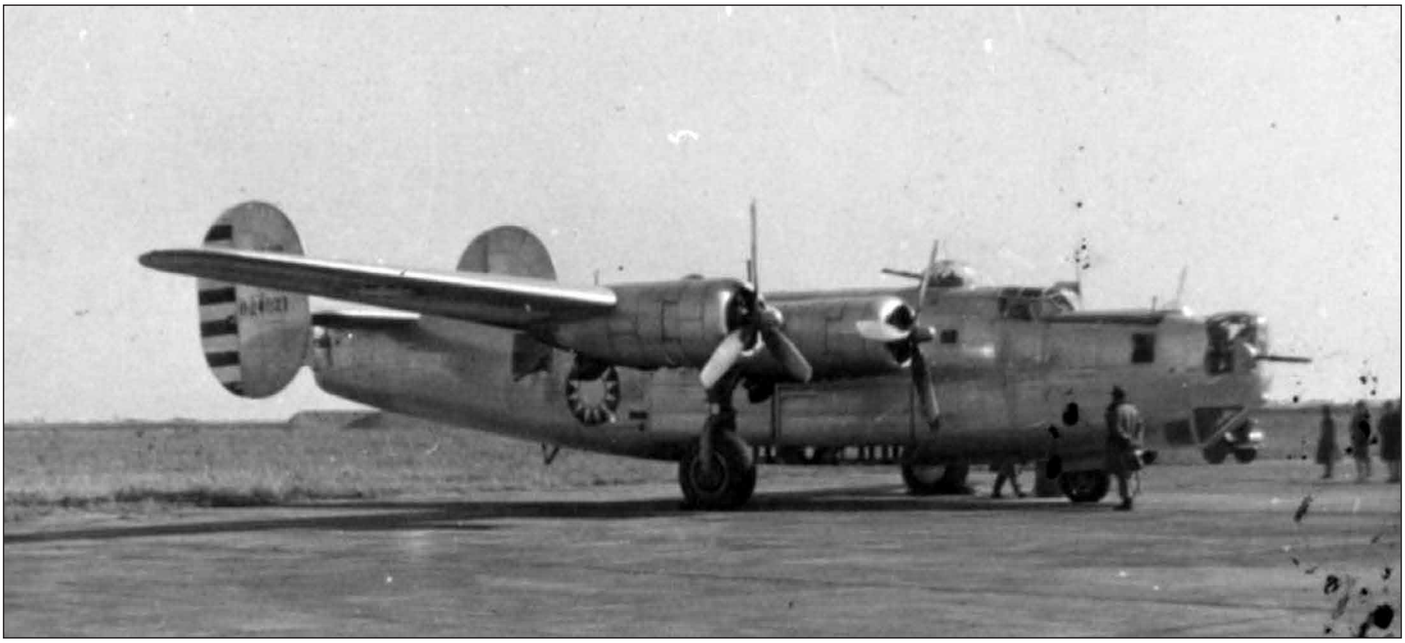
The American consul in Shanghai reviewed the number of American pilots employed by the three Chinese airlines by January 1948: 39 with the CAT, 60 with the CNAC and 15 with the CATC. The remainder were Chinese pilots. However, the consul expressed

At the renewal of the civil war in China, the CNAF saw its efficiency greatly impaired by both the US embargo on selling weapons and the dispersal of units in numerous small detachments, like this detachment of Mustangs of the 5th Fighter Group, put under local army control. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

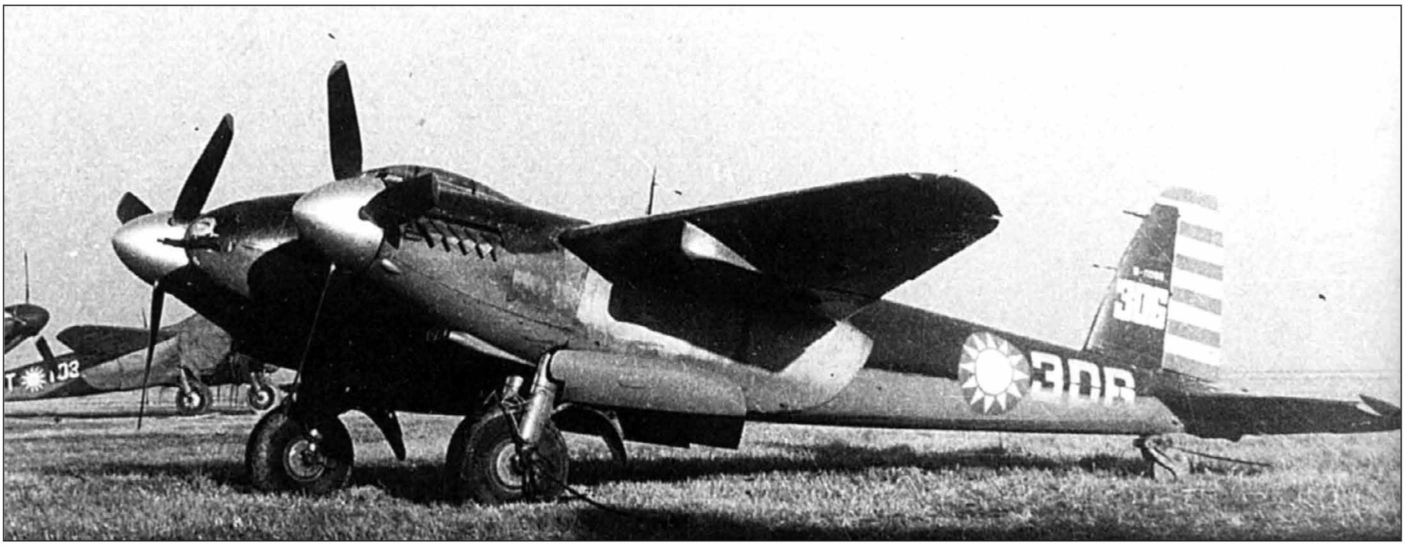
One of the main undisclosed clauses that led the Chinese government to acquire the CAT in 1948 was the assumption that Chennault's pilots were used for paramilitary operations as an auxiliary for the CNAF. Later, they would be involved in directly supporting military operations such as transporting troops. (Felix Smith)



The B-25s of the 1st Medium Bomber Group were also dispersed in numerous detachments making maintenance more difficult. (Wings of China)



The B-24s of the 8th Heavy Bomber Group like the one depicted here, mainly operated from Shanghai but sometimes they were mustered for particular operations. For example, some 14 Liberators were deployed to support an offensive in March 1947 to take Yenan (Yan'an), considered as the Red Capital, where Mao had settled after the Long March. (Albert Grandolini Collection)



China found Canada to be an important arms supplier, circumventing the US embargo. The Canadians were willing to sell important stocks of Second World War equipment, including infantry weapons, artillery and armoured vehicles. As depicted here, the CNAF also acquired some 205 De Havilland Mosquito FB.26s, T.27s and T.29s that equipped the 4th Squadron, 1st Medium Bomber Group. Many airframes were stored and used as a source of spare parts. (Wings of China)

his concern about the capture or the killing of one of them in the Communist controlled areas. He recalled the case of Harley Moore of the CATC who was killed when his aircraft crashed on 17 October 1947 in Hopei (Hubei) province. The Communists exploited the incident to accuse the United States of directly participating in the fighting. They continued to carry out expanding the propaganda campaign until the end of the civil war, particularly accusing Chennault of being a mercenary in the service of the Nationalists.

蚊式機
飛行訓練管理室
MOSQUITO FLIGHT

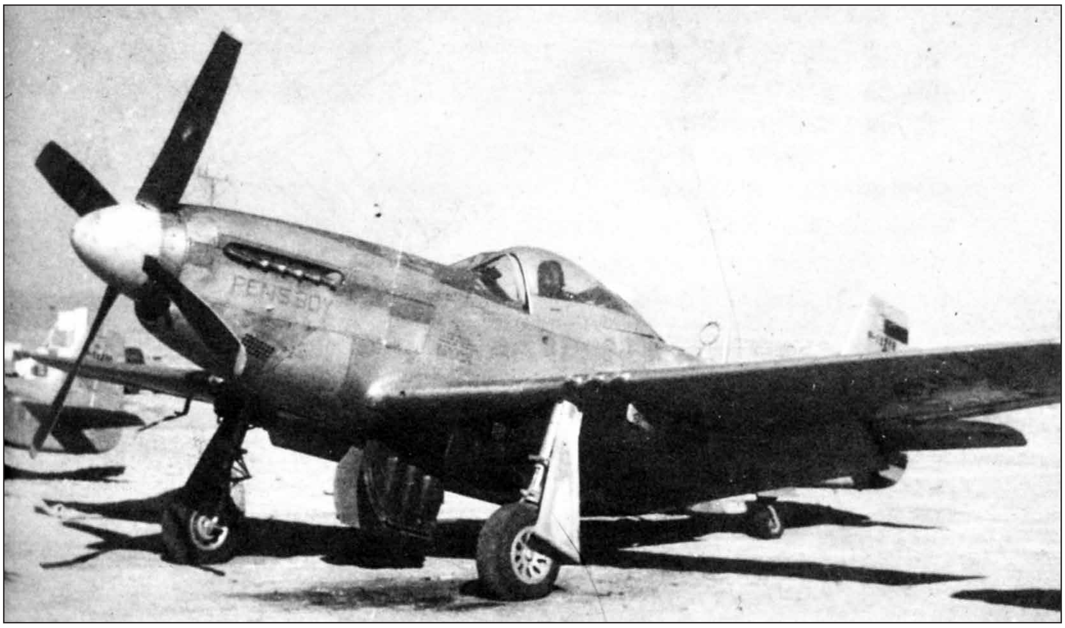
Accompanying the delivery of the Mosquitos was a small group of civilian, Canadian hired, instructors who operated in Shanghai, some are shown here. (George E. Stewart)

12

INTO MANCHURIA

Until spring 1947, the Nationalists managed to keep four strategic corridors open in North China but the Communists went on a general offensive, scoring victories in Honan (Henan) and Hopeh (Hebei) Provinces. Additional air transport capacity was urgently needed as a decisive battle was in progress in Manchuria. Covering some 1,306,000 square kilometres, Manchuria was a huge area to defend, greater than Germany, France and United Kingdom put together. The area was the most industrialised part of the country with one of the largest coal mines in the world at Fushun. The Japanese had installed heavy industries like metallurgical plants or weapons and aircraft factories. They also developed communication infrastructure with 30,000km of surfaced roads, 10,000km of railways and 4,175km of aerial routes.

Soviet troops departure ceremony at Harbin in March 1946. In background is an obsolete Tupolev USB-2M100 training bomber used as a liaison aircraft. (Albert Grandolini Collection)



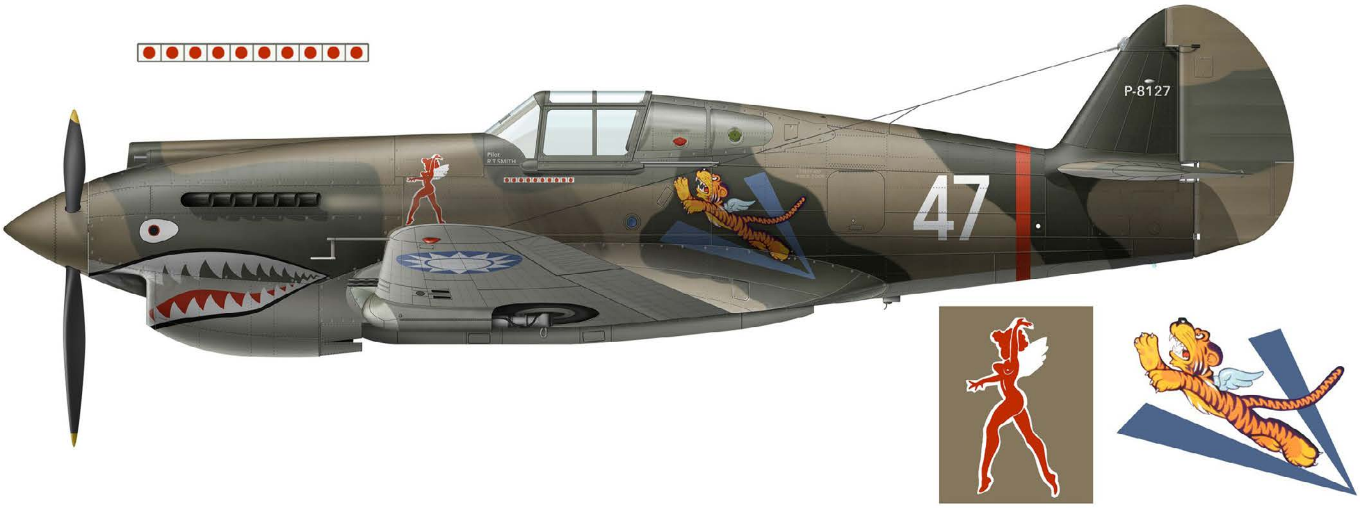
Manchuria was vital for the Chinese government, being the most industrialised part of the country and bordering both Soviet Union and North Korea. The CNAF deployed some 153 aircraft there as soon as the Soviets vacated the local main airbases. Here, a P-51D of the 23rd Squadron, 4th Fighter Group, at Mukden in 1947. (Wings of China)

Although the Soviets had pillaged many factories as ‘war booty’ and had taken the industrial equipment back to Russia, quickly reoccupying the area was the highest priority for the Chinese government. Despite Manchuria being at the extreme limit of their logistical capacities, the Nationalists pressed on as quickly as possible. Ignoring sound military advice from the US advisors of the JUSMAG to secure the China northern plain before moving into Manchuria proper, Chiang Kai Shek had hurriedly moved his best troops into Manchuria.

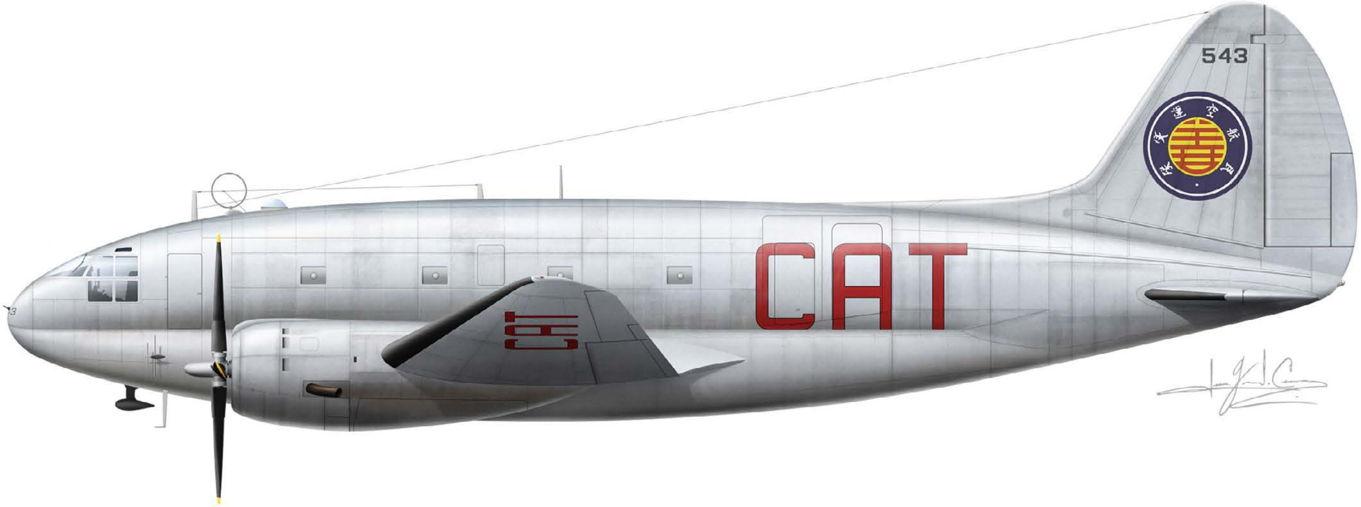
Led by the American-trained New First and New Sixth Armies, the Nationalists had seized control of the major cities in the province, except Harbin, but were not able to extend their authority very far into the countryside. Since December 1947, the Communist forces had launched a major offensive and managed to occupy 17 cities, eliminating 156,000 Nationalist troops in the process. The KMT forces were now surrounded in three pockets centred on the cities of Yingkow (Yingkou), Changchun and Mukden (Shenyang). This last position was reinforced to some 175,000 men. When Communist units destroyed the Alingho Bridge near Chinchow, severing the vital rail line to Peiping, air transportation provided the sole link to the outside for the city’s beleaguered inhabitants.

The deteriorating military situation in the north was the main reason for the government’s decision to continue CAT’s franchise. Nationalist officials made clear at the time of renewal that they expected the airline to support military operations in Manchuria by transporting food and troops, a task only reluctantly and occasionally carried out by the CNAC and CATC. The CAT, with a fleet strengthened by the purchase of 25 additional C-46s and the hiring of new American and Chinese pilots, was immediately thrown into the fight.

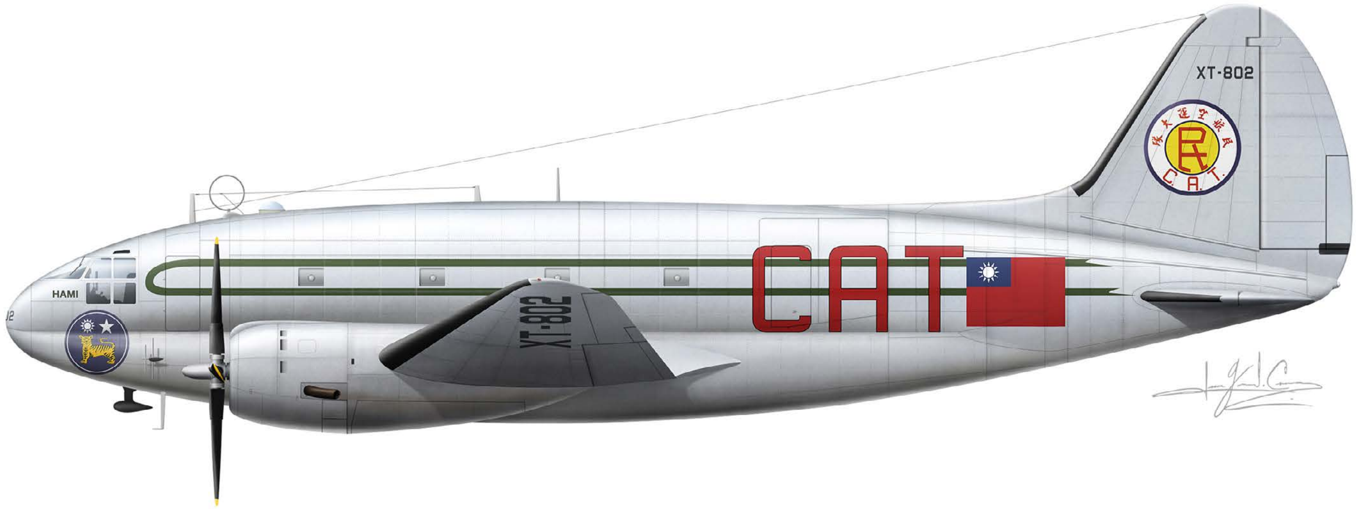
Operations in Mukden began on 18 January 1948. Captain Richard L. Bushbaum led the way, carrying five tons of flour from Peiping to the besieged town and returning with a load of evacuees. CAT personnel,



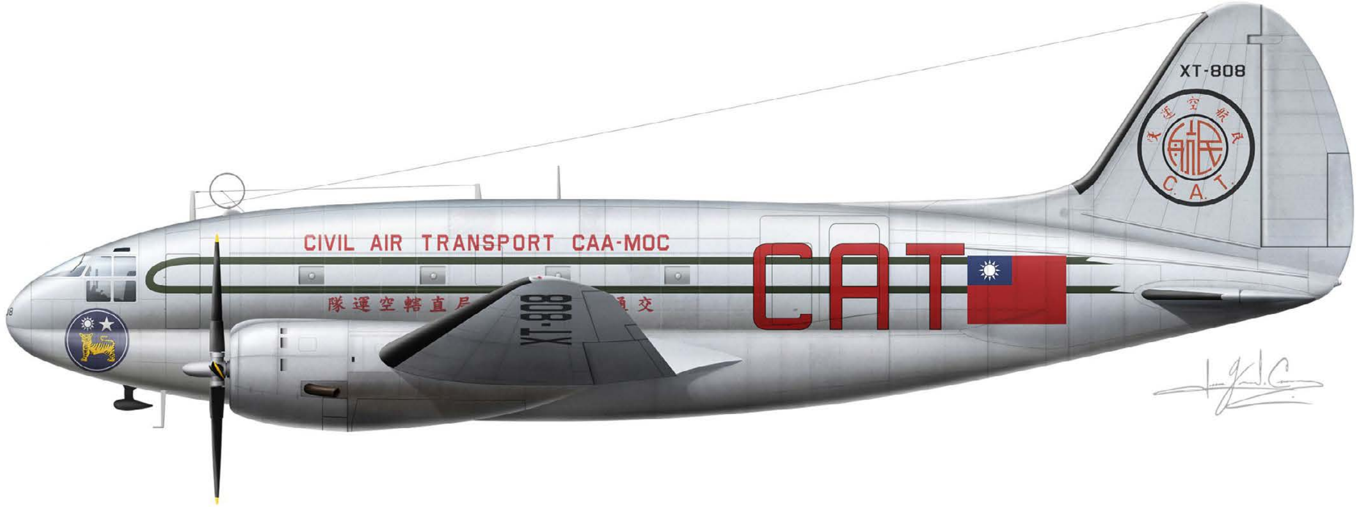
AVG H81-A3 '47' P-8127 is seen here in the colours of the Flying Tigers' 3rd Pursuit Squadron 'Hell's Angels', when it was flown by ace Robert T. Smith, ca. June 1942. Previously, while flying with the 2nd Pursuit Squadron 'Panda Bears', this aircraft was the mount of Flight Leader Johnnie Petach, who was killed in action on 10 July 1942 in another P-40, having volunteered to keep flying combat missions for two weeks after the AVG had been officially disbanded. Insets are shown (top) so-called 'kill markings' applied below the cockpit (essentially Japanese flags, each stood for one aerial victory); pilot's personal insignia (lower centre) and the insignia of the Flying Tigers. (Artwork by Jean-Marie Guillou)



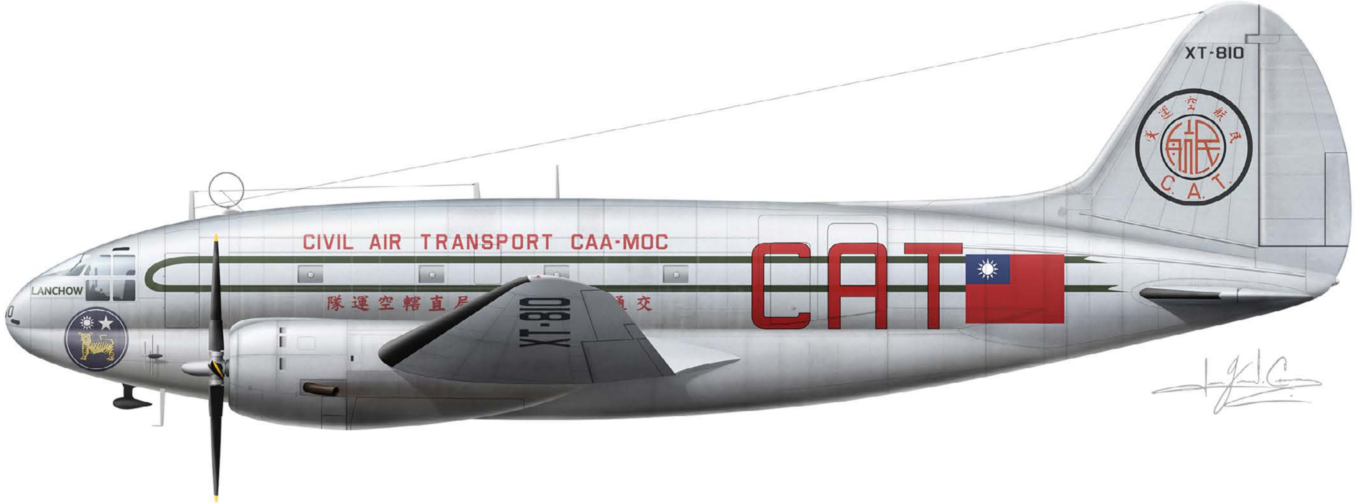
C-46D '543', carrying the early type of registration used by CAT, as CNNRA Air Transport, which simply consisted of the last three digits of their US serial number. This aircraft is s/n 44-78543 and would have carried the '543' serial during the second half of 1947. This profile shows '543' as it looked during its delivery flight to Shanghai, and during its first months of service with CAT. (Artwork by Luca Canossa)



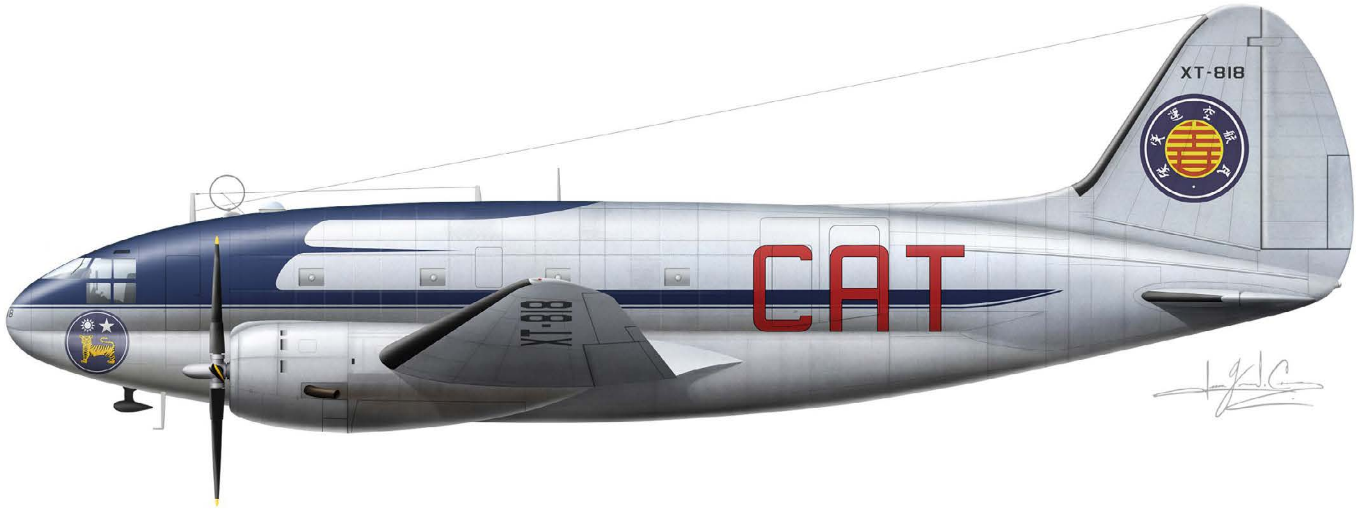
Previously registered as '392' and then as XT-T504, this Curtiss C-46D Commando – shown here in full markings of the CAT, with a dark green cheat line, nickname 'Hami', and the code XT-802, as of 1947–1948 – was to have a long, complicated and adventurous life under various registrations with Air Asia and Air America in Taiwan and over Laos. This included a brief stint in India in 1963 to fly secret missions in support of Tibetan rebels. She was eventually scrapped in 1974. (Artwork by Luca Canossa)



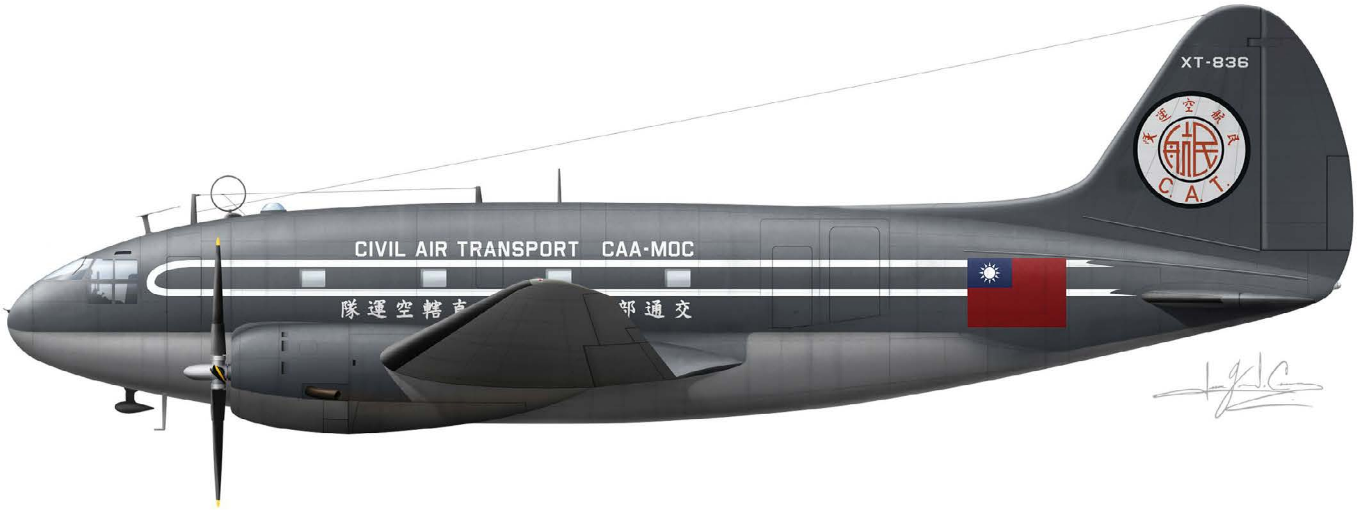
XT-808, a C-46D with serial number 44-78409, is shown here in the new livery and markings that appeared in May 1948, after the Chinese Civil Aeronautics Administration-Ministry of Communications (CAA-MOC) and CAT signed a contract allowing the airline to continue operating in China on relief and rehabilitation missions. This aircraft made it to Taiwan, operated for some time in Central America in preparation of the Bay of Pigs operation, returned to Asia and flew in Laos, mainly with Air America, before being handed over to Royal Air Lao in 1973, was damaged and tracking was lost during the early 1980's. (Artwork by Luca Canossa)



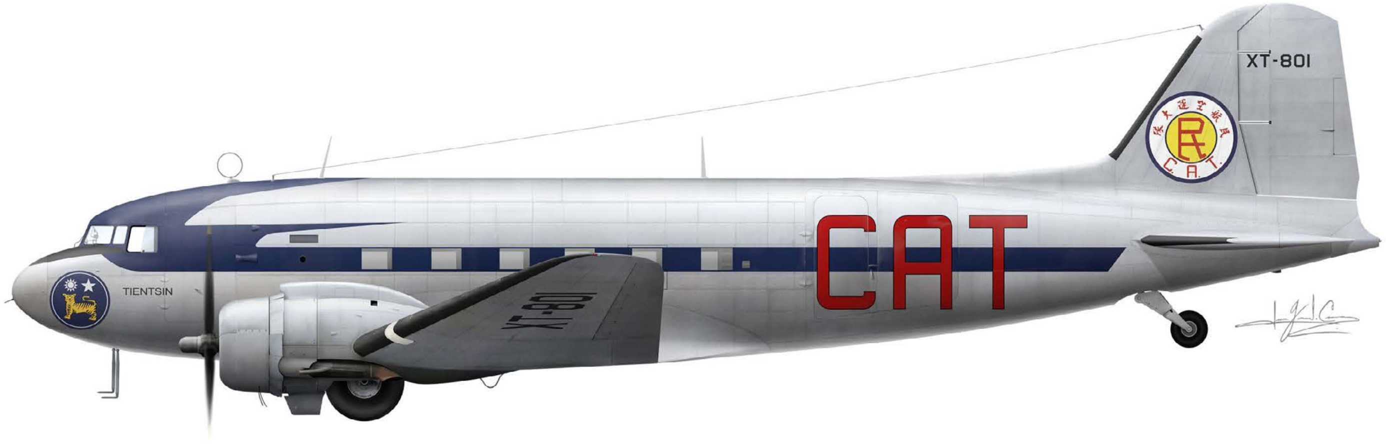
XT-810, formerly '413' and XT-T508, was the first CAT C-46 to be upgraded for regular airline use. By mid-1949, it had received 50 comfortable airliner seats and was destined to carry only civilian passengers on scheduled flights between major Chinese cities. Similar to several other CAT airplanes, XT-810 had been named after a Chinese city, in this case the city of Lanchow. (Artwork by Luca Canossa)



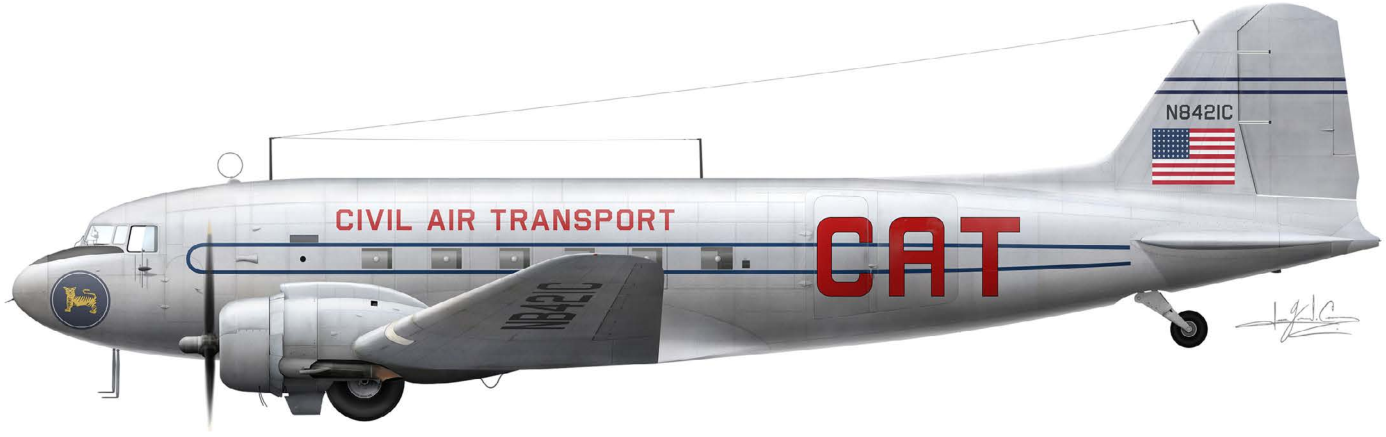
C-46D XT-818, as seen in Manchuria in 1948. The aircraft sports a more commercial airline-styled livery which was used on a small number of C-46 and C-47 airplanes. After 1949, this aircraft saw service under the new registration B-844. On 13 July 1949, XT-818 was used to give the Panchen Lama a joyride over the city of Lanchow. In 1960, the airplane was handed over to Taiwan's Civil Aeronautics Administration in exchange for an aircraft of the same type destroyed in Laos. (Artwork by Luca Canossa)



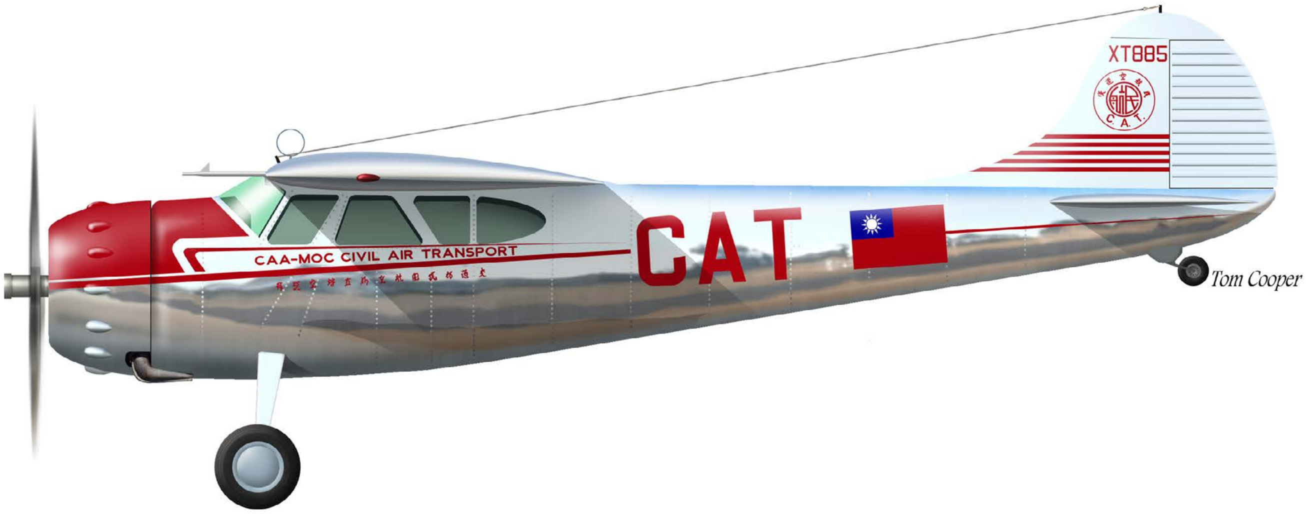
In May 1947, CAT purchased 25 C-46s from US surplus depots in the Philippines. These airframes were to be used only as source for spare parts. However, in January 1949, when CAT was authorised by the Ministry of Communications to increase its fleet, it was decided to rebuild three C-46s from the fleet of 25 planes purchased in 1947. Two airframes were made airworthy and the last to be completed was XT-836, possibly in March 1949. All three airplanes were painted in a dark grey livery. (Artwork by Luca Canossa)



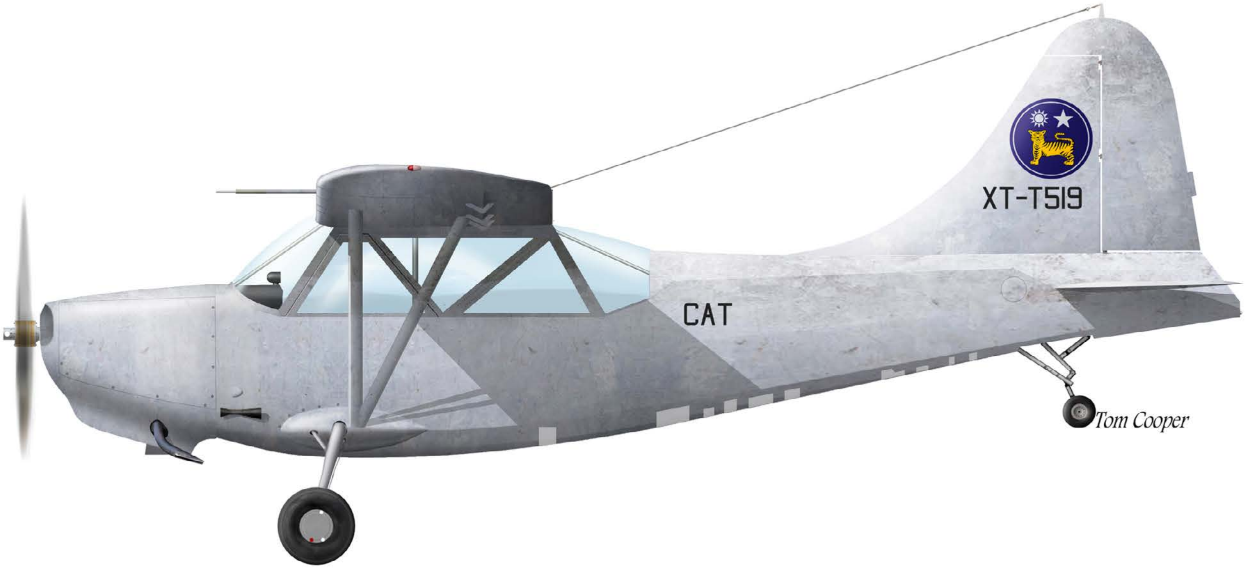
C-47B 43-16215 was one of the original five C-47s operated by CNRRA Air Transport starting in February 1947. Originally registered only as '215', not an official Chinese registration, she later became XT-T501, and received the name 'Tientsin', before being re-registered as XT-801. Out of the original five C-47s, she would be the only one to survive into 1950. Operated by CAT in Taiwan, it was sold in 1959 to the United States International Cooperation Agency and went to Nepal and India. (Artwork by Luca Canossa)



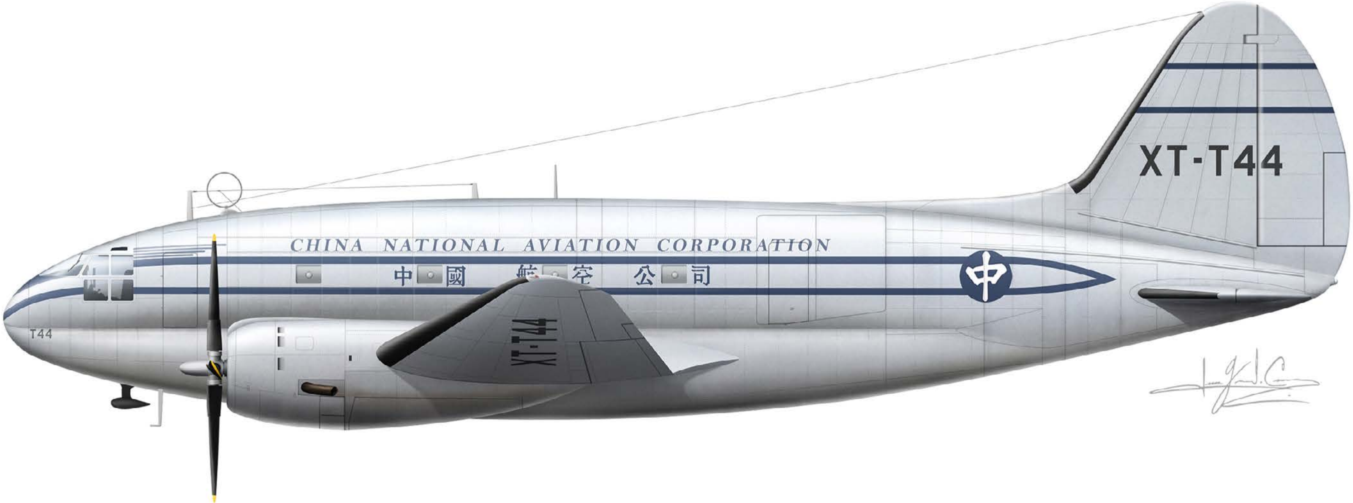
The same airplane as XT-801 depicted above, shown here as it looked in early 1950 at Hong Kong, with US registration, US flag on the tail and with a US airworthiness certificate, a ploy devised by CAT in the hope of keeping their fleet out of reach of the new Communist authorities. (Artwork by Luca Canossa)



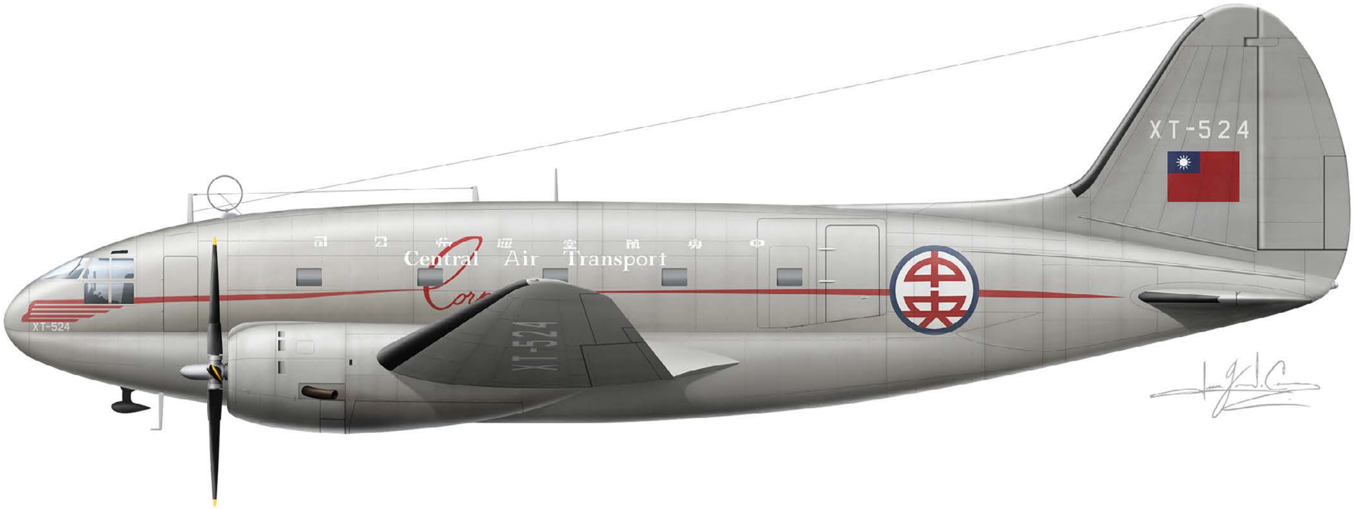
Despite the executive-style livery they carried, CAT's six Cessna 195s were often used in covert operations to infiltrate and resupply CIA agents in Chinese Turkestan and in southern China during the last year of the war. The four surviving airframes were flown to Taiwan. Based on available data, XT-885 appears not to have made it to Taiwan and it may have either crashed or been used for spares. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)



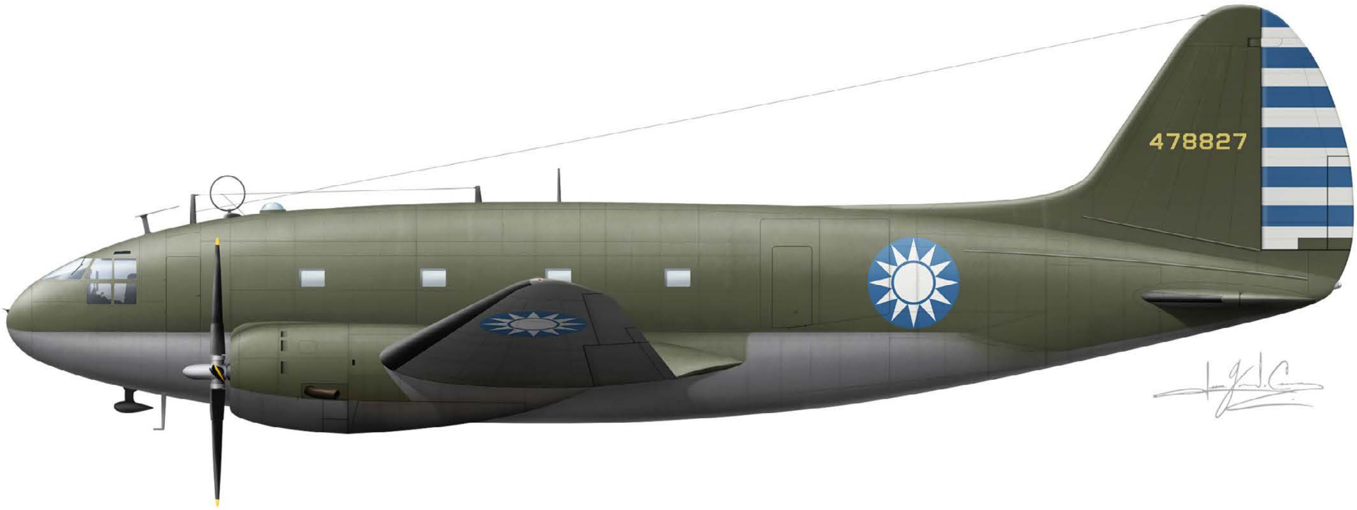
Stinson L-5 Sentinel XT-T519, as it appeared in early 1948 with CAT insignia on the vertical tail. This L-5 was used for liaison and medevac missions. In April 1948, flying from Tsingtao, this L-5 was involved in the daring rescue operation at Weihsien, together with another L-5 borrowed from the US Marines with painted-out markings, and a couple of Piper Cubs. XT-T519 was probably damaged, possibly destroyed or not repaired during the Weihsien operation. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)



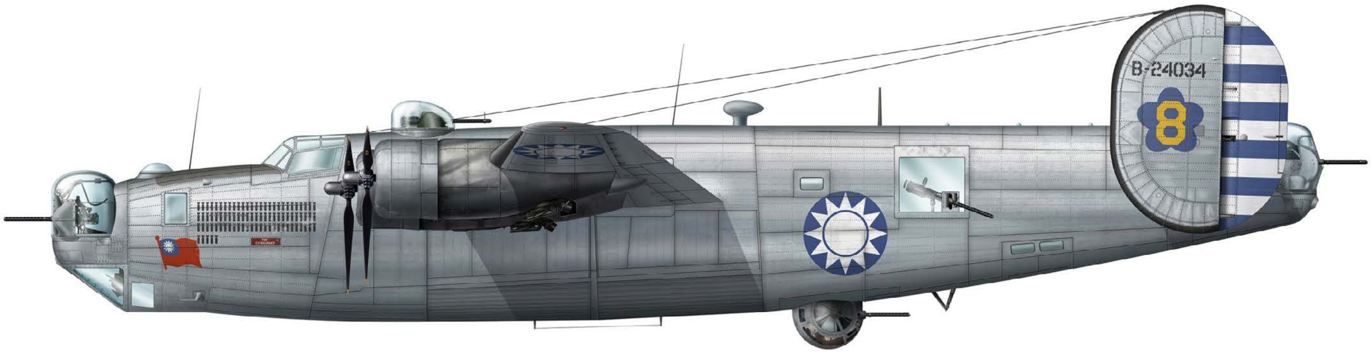
China National Aviation Corporation (CNAC) C-46 XT-T44 depicted in the airline's standard livery. The roundel with the Chinese character for 'Chung' was introduced while flying the 'Hump' route during the Second World War. It was carried both sides of the fuselage and on the over and underside of the wings, left side, while the registration was on the opposite side. (Artwork by Luca Canossa)



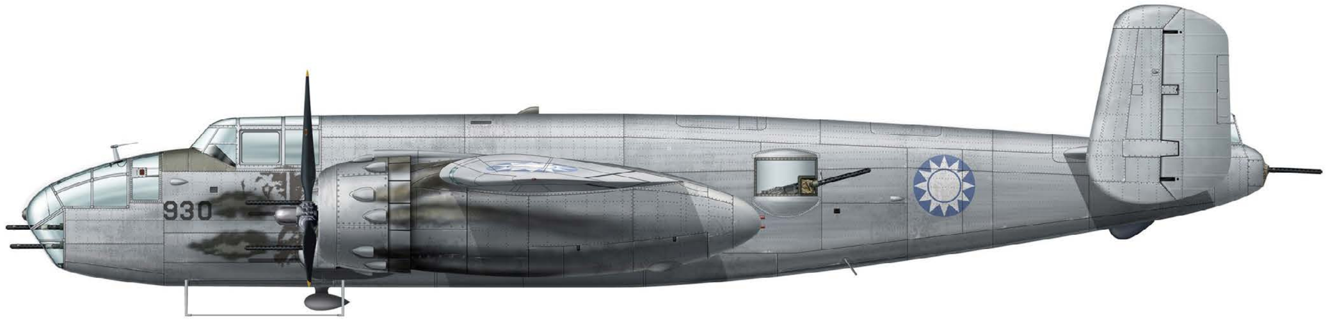
This is a reconstruction of one of C-46s of the Central Air Transport Corporation (CATC), which was largely equipped with this type and with C-47 and also with half a dozen of Convair CV-240s, all used on regular passenger services. Together with the cargo planes of CAT and CNAC, CATC's fleet was frequently used in support of the Chinese Nationalist Army plagued by a shortage of transport planes. In November 1949, Chinese pilots and staff from CATC and CNAC defected to the Communists on board a dozen airplanes from both fleets that were held in Hong Kong. (Artwork by Luca Canossa)



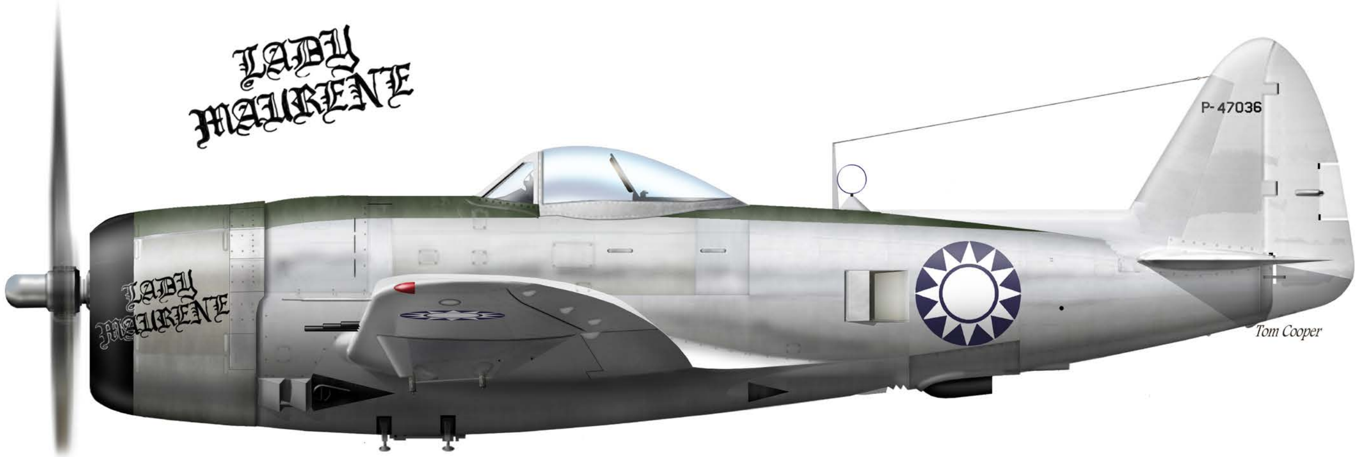
The main CNAF transport type in service during the 1945–1949 period was the Curtiss C-46, with over 200 airframes that equipped the 10th and 20th Transport Groups, like this C-46 of the former unit. There were however, never enough of them to fulfil the air transport needs, forcing the Chinese authorities to requisition civilian airlines, particularly the Civil Air Transport, to support the Chinese Army. (Artwork by Luca Canossa)



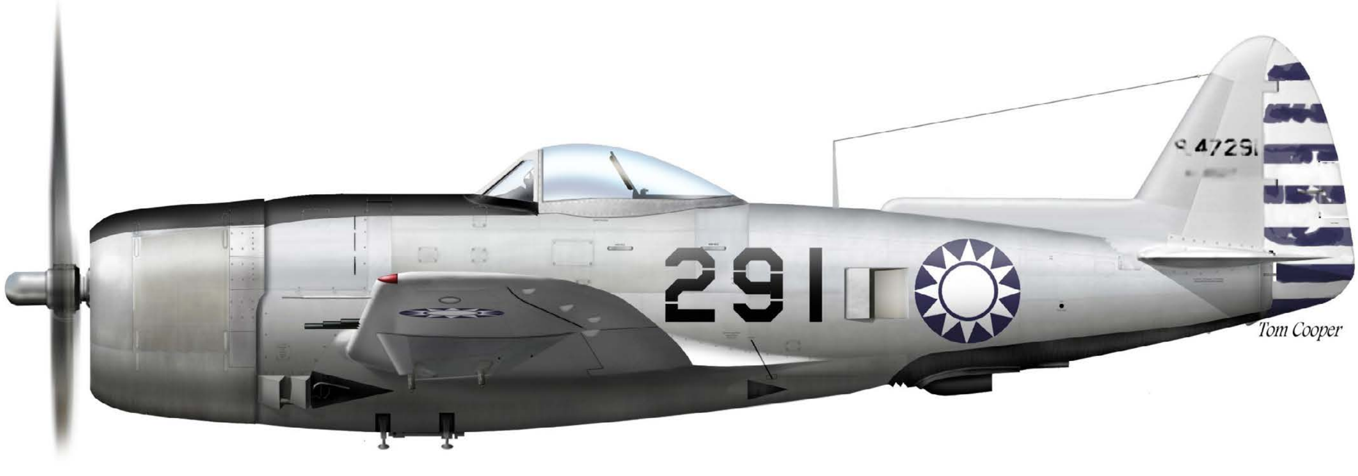
The CNAF received 29 Consolidated B-24Ms at the end of the Second World War. This B-24M of the 8th Heavy Bomber Group was operating from Jiangwan AB (Shanghai) in 1948. At that stage of the conflict, almost all the bombers of the unit were adorned with the group insignia on their tails. This particular aircraft had also a Nationalist China flag painted on the nose as well as an impressive number of sorties' markings below the cockpit. In addition to bombing missions, the CNAF Liberators were also occasionally used for dropping supplies by parachute, the bundles being installed in the bomb bay. (Artwork by Jean-Marie Guillou)



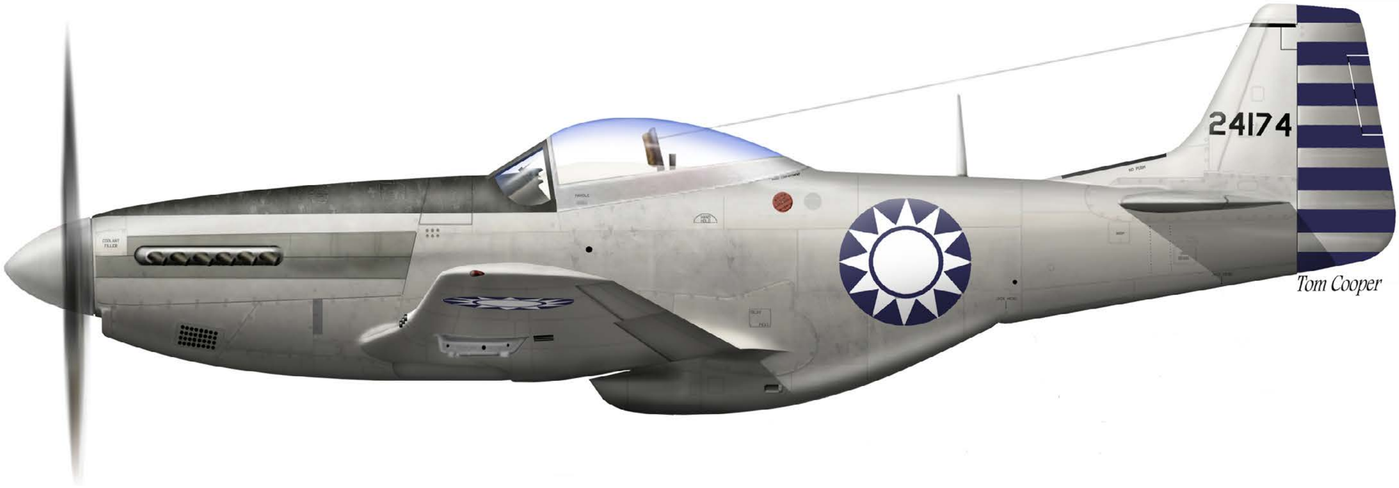
The CNAF received 84 B-25s of various marks, including B-25Ds, B-25Gs, B-25Hs, and B-25Js. This B-25J of the 1st Medium Bomber Group landed on 12 December 1949 at Hong Kong for refuelling while on route towards Taiwan during the final phase of the Chinese Civil War. It had no less than 13 people on board, the crew and members of their families, including wives and children. Despite having their relatives with them, the crew strafed several Communist targets on route. Note that this aircraft had its dorsal defensive turret removed. (Artwork by Jean-Marie Guillou)



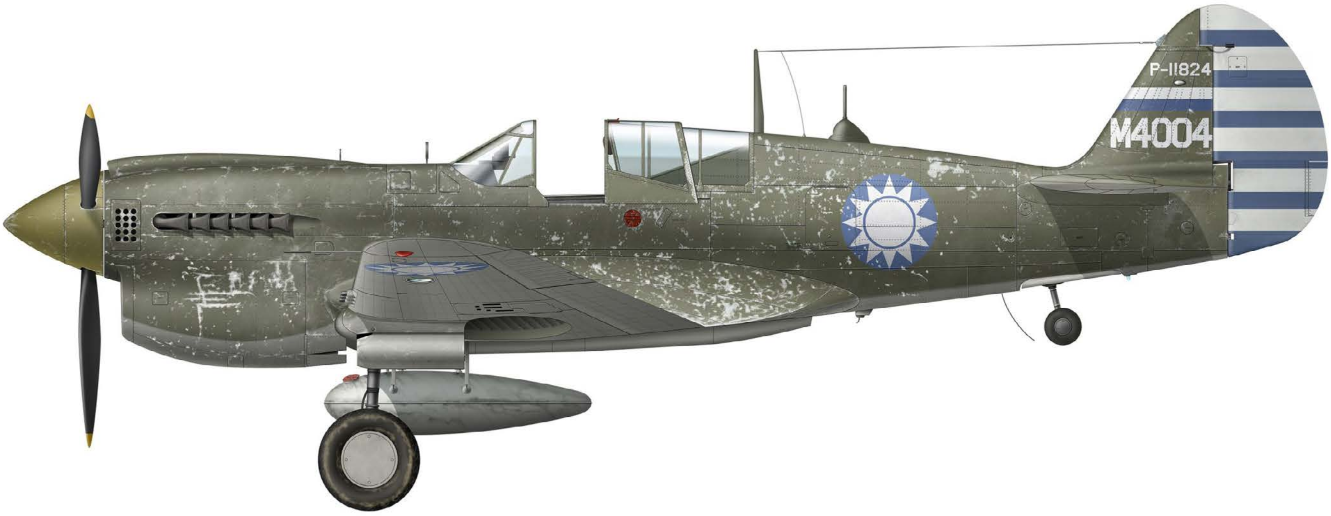
The CNAF received some 42 P-47Ds at the end of the Second World War. This Republic P-47D was from the CNAF 11th Fighter Group in early 1946. The aircraft still sported the individual markings, 'Lady Maurene' painted on the engine's cowling, from its former owner, the USAAF 81st Fighter Group. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)



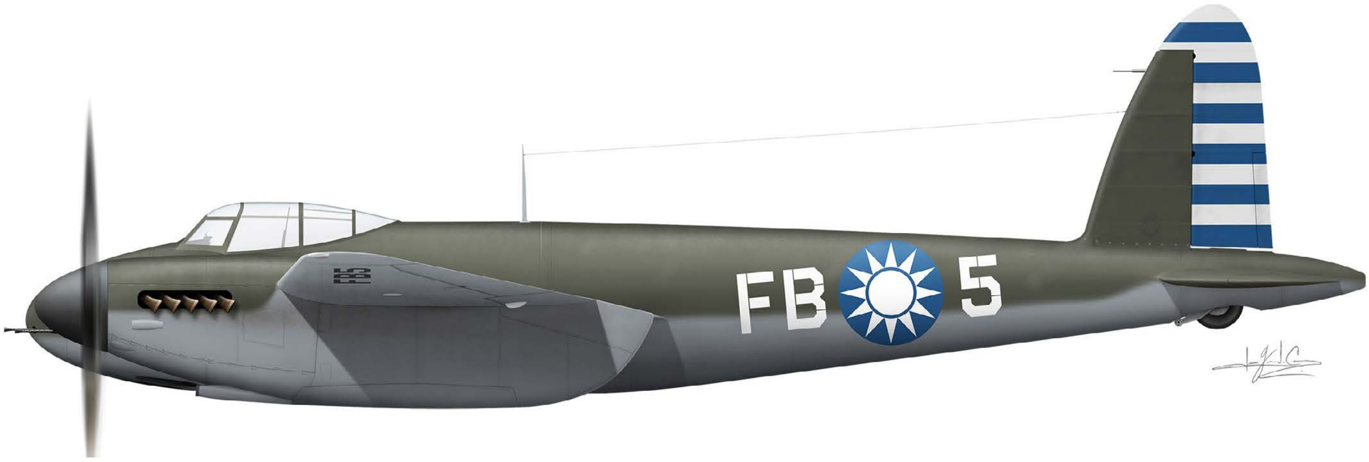
The Republic P-47N was the long-range escort variant of the famed Thunderbolt and entered service at the end of the Second World War. After the United States lifted their arms embargo on China in May 1947, the CNAF began to receive additional surplus Thunderbolts in both P-47D and P-47N variants, with 85 airframes of the later. This P-47N belonged to the CNAF 11th Fighter Group that operated from Hsian. Chennault had a plan to borrow some ten P-47Ns to be based inside the besieged city of Taiyuan within the projected Operation Demonstration in January 1949. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)



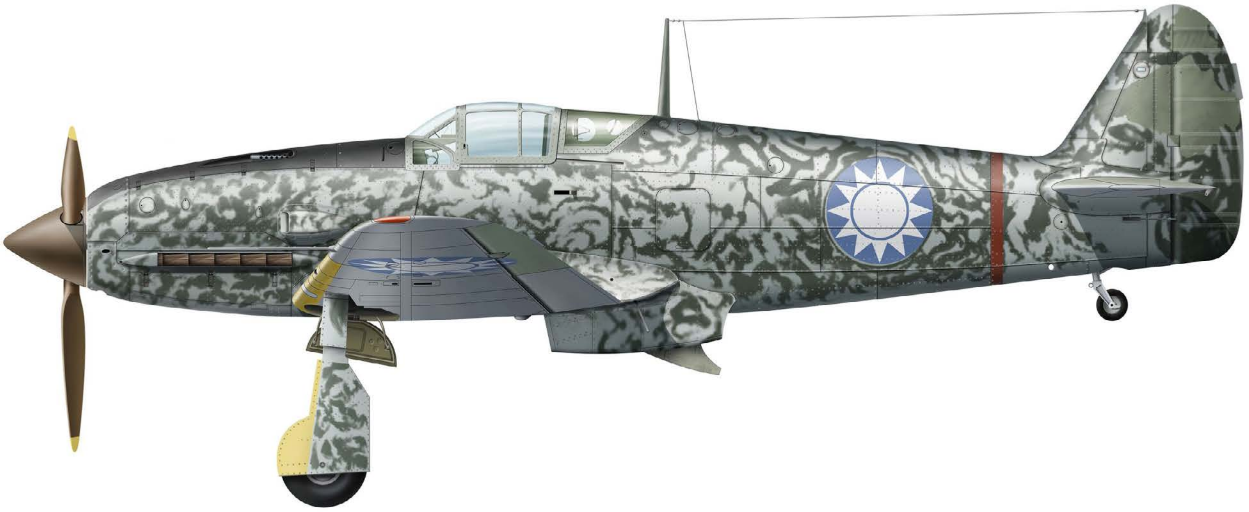
The Mustang became the most numerous fighter aircraft in service with the CNAF during the last phase of the Chinese civil war. At least some 359 P-51s of various marks, P-51Bs, P-51Cs, P-51Ds and P-51Ks, were operated by the 3rd, 4th and 5th Fighter Groups. This P-51D belonged to the later unit and was seen during the Hsuchow Battle in January 1949. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)



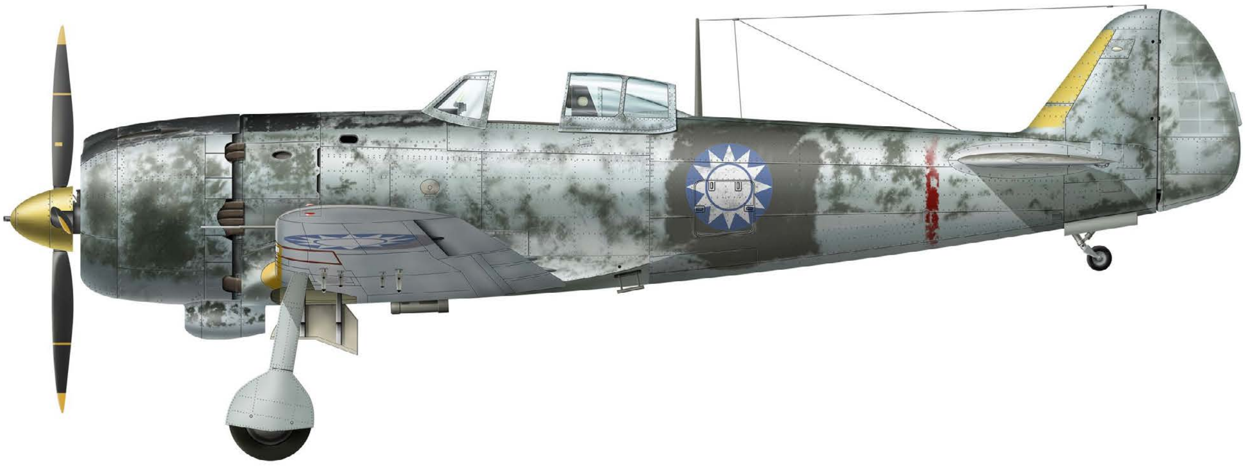
Prior to deliveries of P-51 Mustangs, the Curtiss P-40 was the most numerous Chinese fighter aircraft type in service at the end of the Second World War with some 330 of them taken on charge. A dwindling number of Warhawks, like this well weathered P-40N, continued to serve until the end of 1948, particularly with the 11th Fighter Group at Taiyuan. (Artwork by Jean-Marie Guillou)



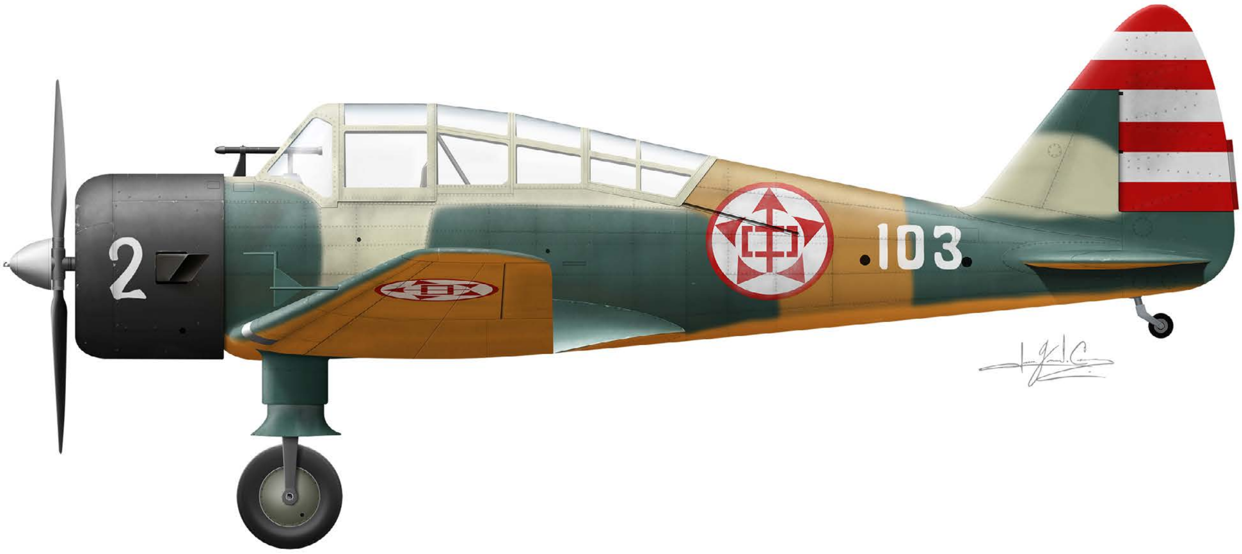
Some 205 De Havilland Mosquitos of various marks were bought by China after the Second World War in order to circumvent the US arms embargo imposed between July 1946 and May 1947. They reinforced and partially reequipped the CNAF 1st Medium Bomber Group that operated the B-25 Mitchells. This Mosquito FB.Mk 26 belonged to the 4th Squadron at Jiangwan AB (Shanghai) in 1948. (Artwork by Luca Canossa)



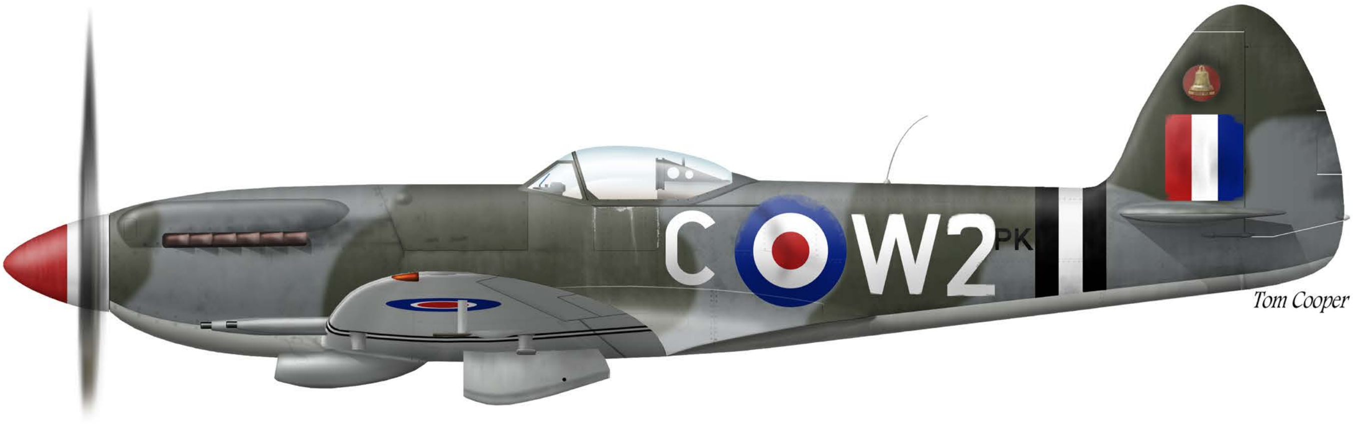
The CNAF captured a lot of Japanese built aircraft after the Japanese capitulation on 2 September 1945, including a number of Kawasaki Ki-61 Hien, one of which is shown here. Most of them came from units of the former Imperial Japanese Army Air Force based around Canton, Nanking and Peiping. Shanghai and Formosa hosted some miscellaneous Imperial Japanese Navy Air Force units. The Japanese-built aircraft were grouped within the CNAF 6th Fighter Bomber Group. Very few Kawasaki Ki-61 Hien operated in China, including those of the Dai-5 Rensei Hikôtai (5th Aeronautical Training Unit). It was probably an aircraft from that unit that was pressed into service of the CNAF 18th Fighter Squadron at Nan-Yuan AB, Peiping, in January 1946. (Artwork by Jean-Marie Guillou)



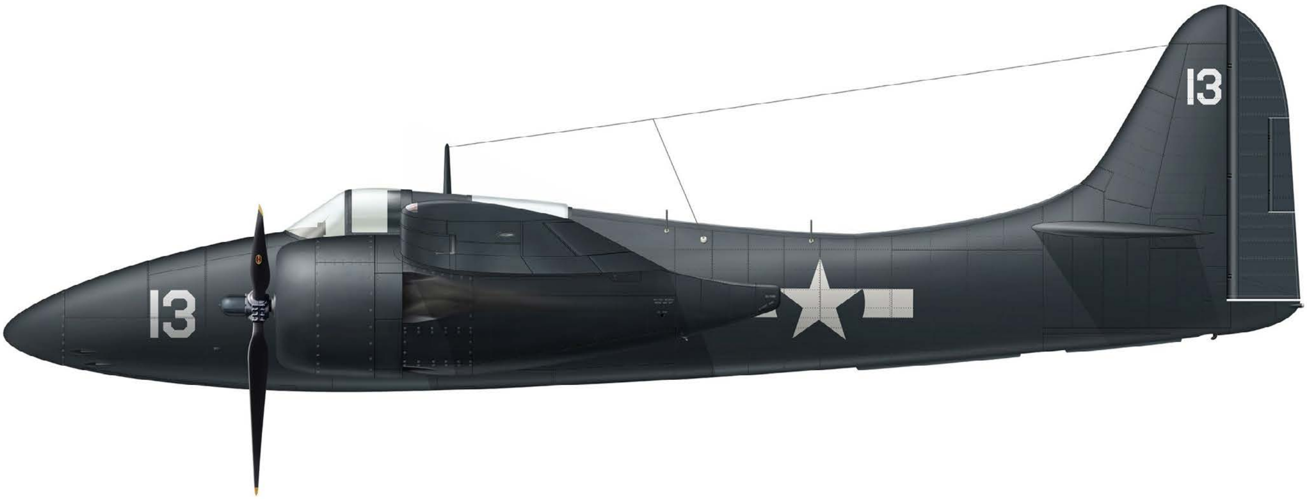
The Nakajima Ki-84 Hayate was the most advanced Japanese fighter aircraft operating in the China – Manchuria Theatre, equipping the 25th, 48th, 85th, 104th, and 204th Sentais of the Imperial Japanese Army Air Force. This Hayate was pressed into service with the CNAF 19th Fighter Squadron, 6th Fighter Bomber Group at Nan-Yuan AB, Peiping, in January 1946. Due to a lack of technical support, most of the Japanese-built aircraft were withdrawn from service by the spring of that year. (Artwork by Jean-Marie Guillou)



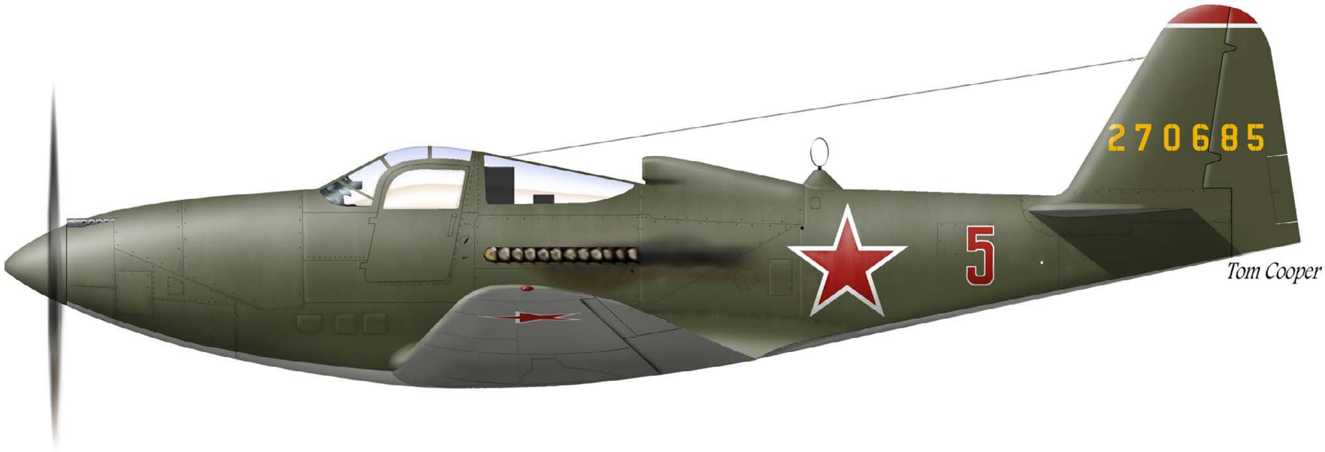
Some 30 Tachikawa Ki-55 advanced trainers were captured by the Communists in Manchuria and served to set up the People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) North East Aviation School with mostly captured Japanese instructors. This Ki-55 was serving at Mudanjiang where the school had settled in November1948. The aircraft wore the first communist national markings style, in use until the end of 1949. (Artwork by Luca Canossa)



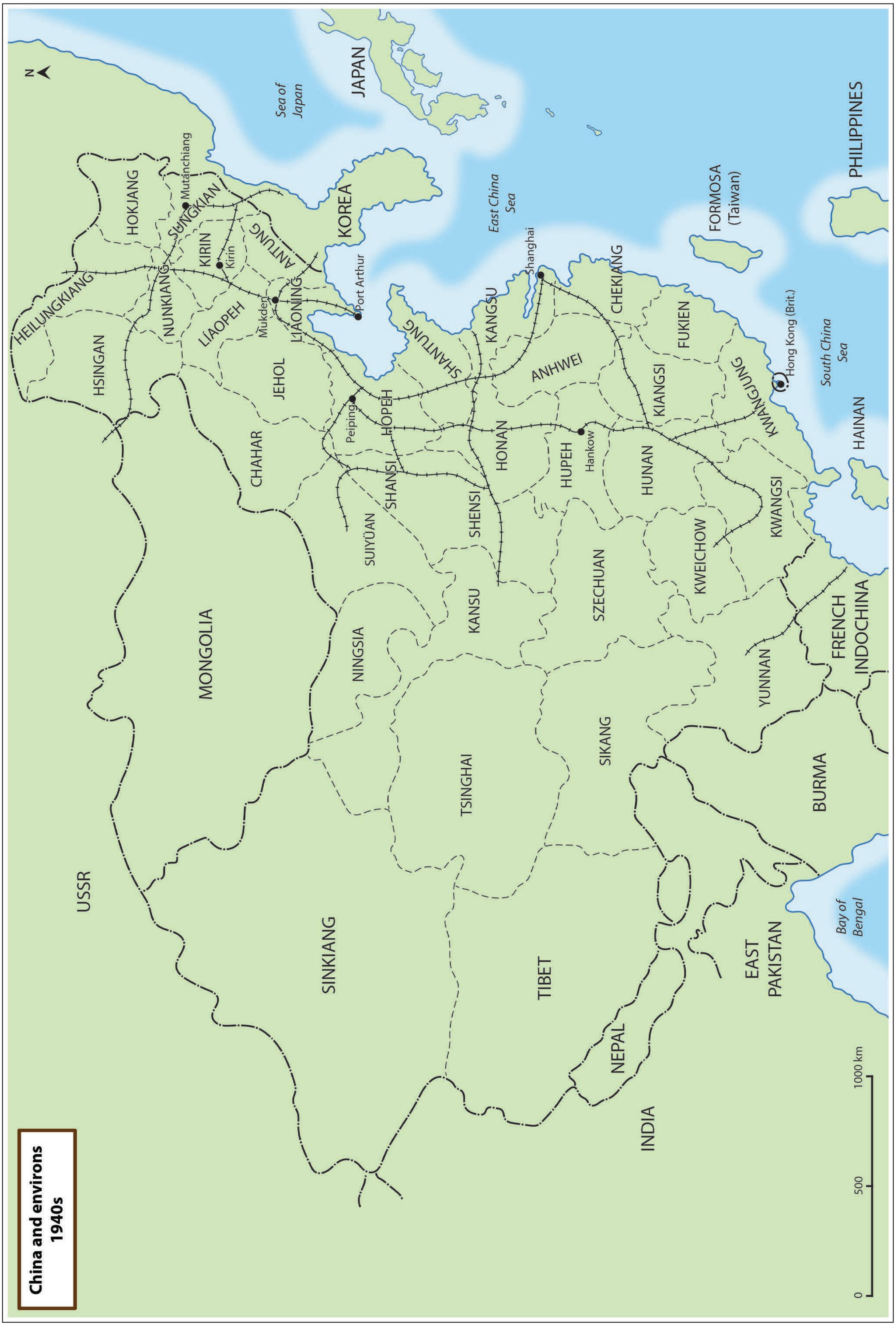
In order to reinforce the Hong Kong defences, the United Kingdom decided to deploy a permanent fighter unit there equipped with Spitfire F.24s, rather than occasional rotational units. The No. 80 Squadron arrived in July 1949. A Spitfire F.24 of the unit was seen here at the Kai Tak AB at the end of 1949. The F.24s were supplemented by Spitfire PR Mk XIXs on reconnaissance duties. Several Spitfires of No. 80 Squadron were later handed over to the Hong Kong Auxiliary Air Force. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)



An F7F-2N of the USMC VMF (N)-531 based at Tsingtao in February 1947. It operated alongside the F7F-2Ns of the sister VMF (N)-533 Squadron which left the US Chinese base for Ford Island, Hawaii, on-board the aircraft carrier USS *Tarawa* (CV-40) in May 1947. The VMF (N)-531 soon followed and returned to United States in May of the same year. The last USMC air units remaining in Tsingtao were the F4U-4 Corsairs of the VMA-211 until the evacuation of the base in January 1949. (Artwork by Jean-Marie Guillou)



The Soviet Union received some 2,400 P-63 Kingcobras from the United States by the end of the Second World War. They served well into the early 1950s when they were replaced by new jet fighters. This P-63A-5 belonged to the 718th Fighter Regiment, 153rd Fighter Division, 83rd Mixed Air Corps, at Port Arthur in 1948. They regularly harassed the CAT transports that were nearing the Soviet naval base. Another Soviet Far East unit equipped with Kingcobras was the Navy Pacific Fleet 7th Fighter Division at Vladivostok. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)


China and environs
1940s
N
Sea of Japan
JAPAN
KOREA
East China Sea
FORMOSA (Taiwan)
PHILIPPINES
South China Sea
HAINAN
Hong Kong (Brit.)
USSR
MONGOLIA
HEILUNGKIANG
HSINGAN
HOKJANG
Mutanchiang
SUNGKIANG
NUNKIANG
KIRIN
Kirin
ANTUNG
LIAOPEH
Mukden
LIAONING
Port Arthur
JEHOL
CHAHAR
Peiping
HOPEH
SHANTUNG
KANGSU
Shanghai
ANHWEI
CHEKIANG
FUKIEN
KIANGSI
KWANGTUNG
HONAN
HUPEH
Hankow
HUNAN
KWANGSI
KWEICHOW
SHANSI
SHENSI
SUIYÜAN
NINGSIA
KANSU
SZECHUAN
YUNNAN
FRENCH INDOCHINA
SIKANG
TSINGHAI
SINKIANG
TIBET
BURMA
EAST PAKISTAN
Bay of Bengal
NEPAL
INDIA
0
500
1000 km

China and its environs, 1940s. (Map by George Anderson)

The Thunderbolts of the 11th Fighter Group were also deployed in rotation to the Manchurian theatre. A P-47D seen here at Harbin. (Wing of China)

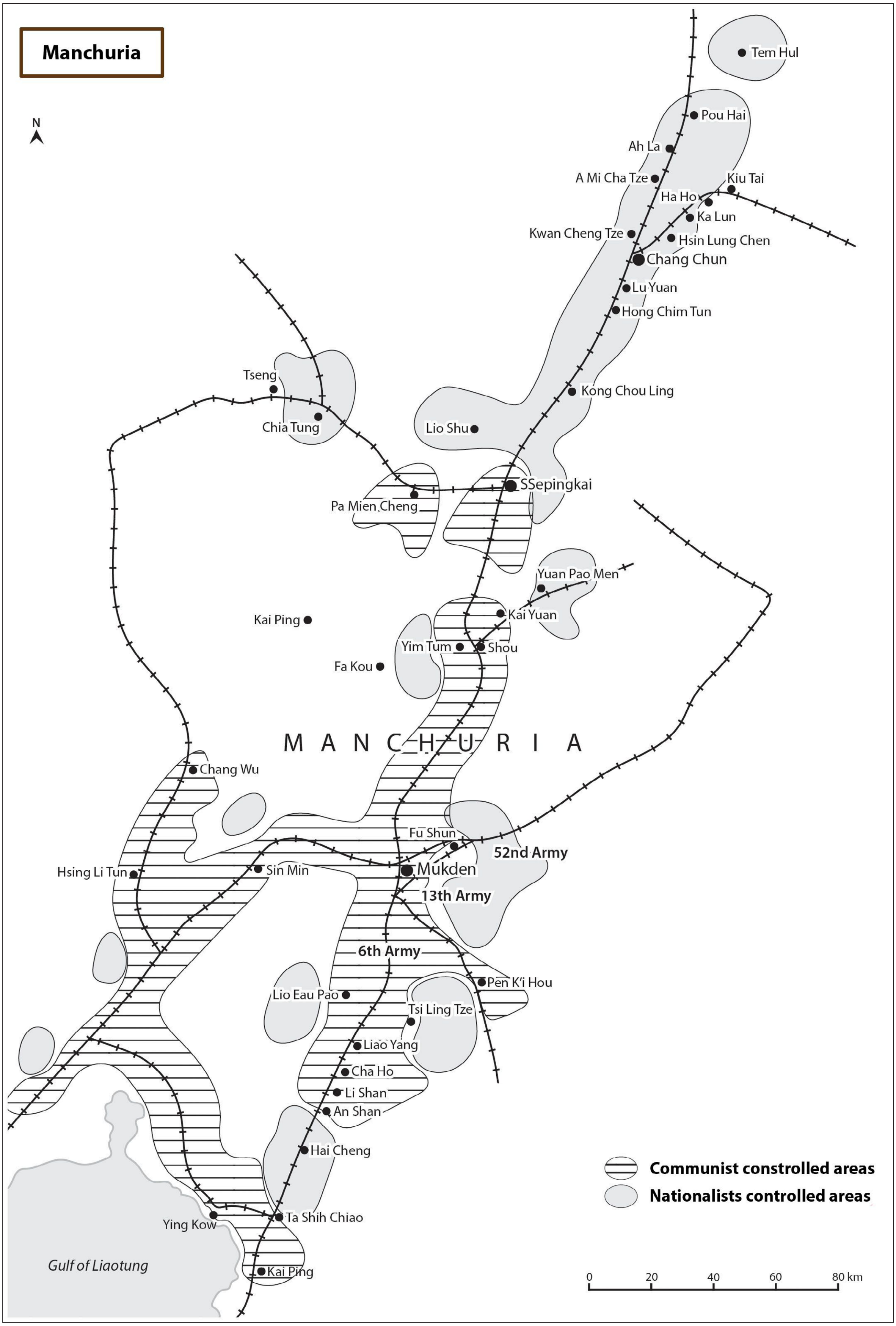
headed by operations agent David H. Stauffer, arrived the following day to set up control procedures at Mukden's Hun Ho airfield. There was no control tower, barely a half-mile runway, a parking area and a few abandoned, wind-swept hangars. Stauffer installed a VHF transmitter-receiver in a dilapidated bus and established air-to-ground communications at the airport. At the end of each day, the bus carried CAT personnel back to the warmth of the Railway Hotel.

The Nationalists had put together six divisions with troops from all over the country and the CAT was involved, with the CNAC and CATC, in

705
B31134
430836
623

The 1st Medium Bomber Group was also heavily engaged in Manchuria like these B-25Js of the 3 Bomber Squadron at Peiping. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

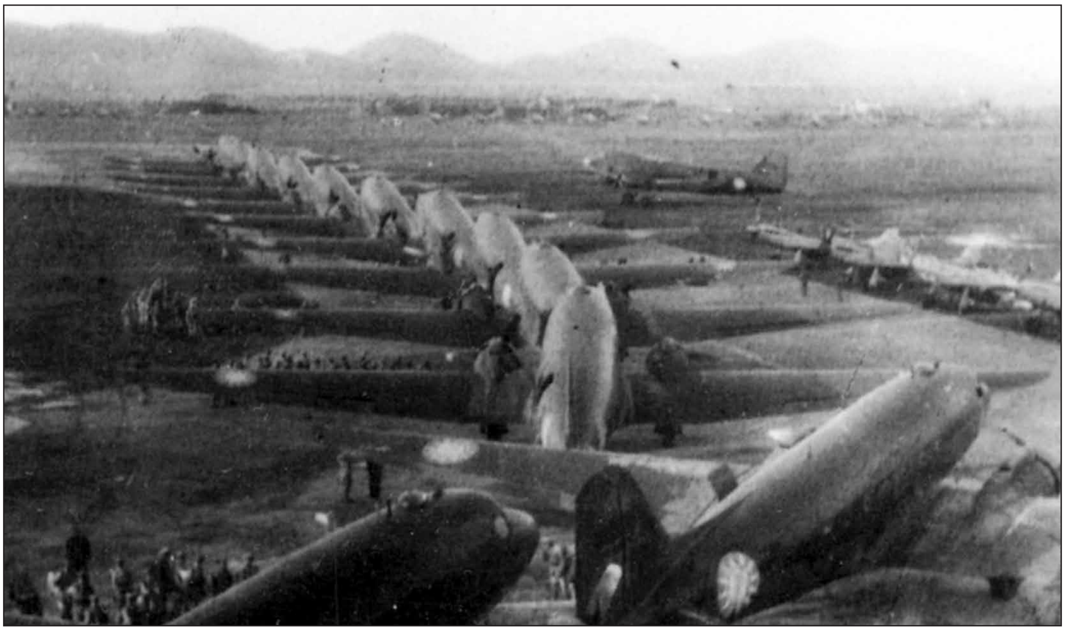
The 12th Reconnaissance Squadron also deployed a detachment of its Lightning F-5s in Manchuria. Operating from Mukden, they flew long reconnaissance sorties of up to seven and a half hours along the Soviet border, sometimes encountering Soviet fighters that tried to intercept them. (Randy Smith)

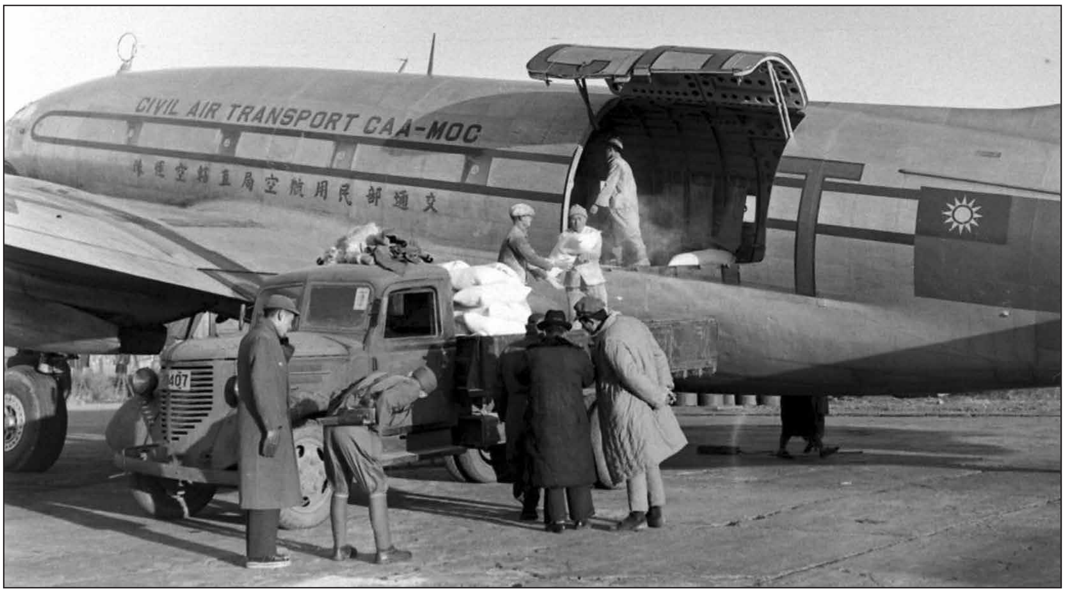

Manchuria
N
Tem Hul
Pou Hai
Ah La
A Mi Cha Tze
Kiu Tai
Ha Ho
Ka Lun
Kwan Cheng Tze
Hsin Lung Chen
Chang Chun
Lu Yuan
Hong Chim Tun
Tseng
Kong Chou Ling
Chia Tung
Lio Shu
SSepingkai
Pa Mien Cheng
Yuan Pao Men
Kai Yuan
Kai Ping
Yim Tum
Shou
Fa Kou
M A N C H U R I A
Chang Wu
Fu Shun
52nd Army
Hsing Li Tun
Sin Min
Mukden
13th Army
6th Army
Pen K'i Hou
Lio Eau Pao
Tsi Ling Tze
Liao Yang
Cha Ho
Li Shan
An Shan
Hai Cheng
Communist controlled areas
Nationalists controlled areas
Ying Kow
Ta Shih Chiao
Gulf of Liaotung
Kai Ping
0
20
40
60
80 km

Map-2: The situation in Manchuria by early 1948. (Map drawn by George Anderson) flying these reinforcements to Manchuria. CAT crews also evacuated in January 1948 some 7,000 government technicians and their families from Mukden to Peiping (Beiping). Harsh winter conditions, long working hours and enemy fire turned these flights into a gruelling challenge. Nevertheless, the operations quickly settled into a type of routine. An aircraft would arrive from Peiping, the crew covered in white flour dust that had stiffed from the thin sacks. Porters unloaded the transport while waiting passengers shivered in unheated buses under subzero temperatures. Then, fifty-odd men, women, and children would board the C-46 for the 400-mile flight to the comparative safety of Peiping.

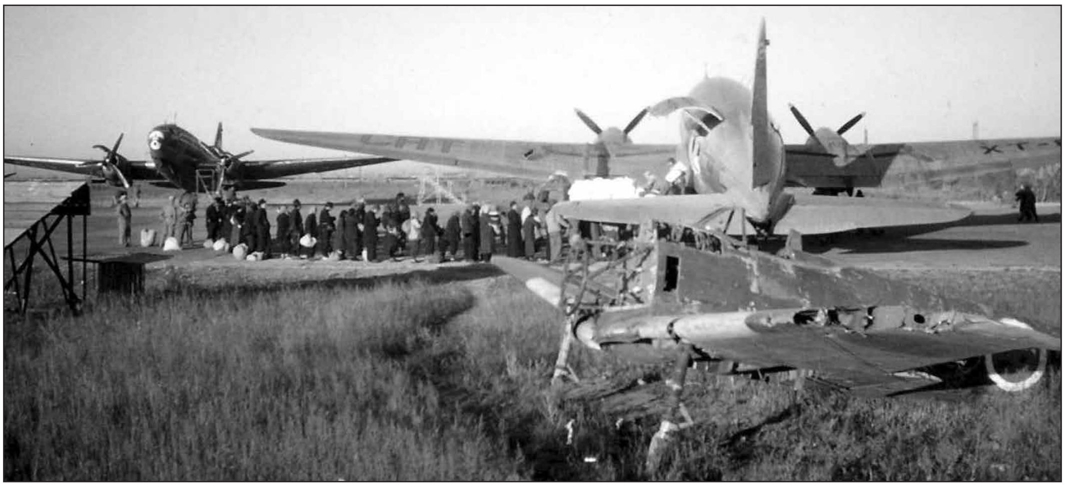
To avoid being hit by Communist ground fire, aircraft would circle the field after take-off, climbing to 5,000 feet before heading on a course for Peiping. Arriving aircraft would circle over the city at high altitudes then make a rapid, spiralling descent to land. Some crews completed up to seven or even 10 missions per day in these conditions. To transport the supplies stored at Peiping and Tsingtao (Quingdao), the planes often took a shortcut over the Gulf of Petchili (Bohai), where they were often intercepted by Soviet fighters based at Port Arthur (Dalian).

Most of the time, the fighters would just fly alongside the cargo planes but some pilots had a more aggressive attitude and simulated attacks. Bob Buol, for example, faced a Soviet pilot who tried to force him to land. Buol identified the fighter plane as an 'Airacobra'. It was probably a P-63 Kingcobra, a type that was used by the 718th Fighter Aviation Regiment, 153rd Fighter Aviation Division, of the 83rd Mixed Air Corps, together with


By January 1948, most of the Chinese Nationalist forces were surrounded in the main cities of Manchuria and could only be re-supplied by air. The CNAF mobilised all its transport assets for the task, like these C-47s of the 101st and 102nd Transport Squadrons, 10th Transport Group, operating from Peiping. (Wings of China)



There were not enough CNAF transport aircraft to sustain the Nationalist garrisons in Manchuria. The Chinese government then decided to requisition all available civilian transport aircraft from the CATC, CNAC and CAT to participate in the effort. This CAT C-46 was seen offloading sacks of flour at the Mukden's Hun Ho airfield. (Albert Grandolini Collection)


A group of refugees waiting for flour to be offloaded from a CAT C-46, before embarking. In the foreground is the wreckage of a Japanese Nakajima Ki-43 fighter. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

The air bridge to Manchuria was a joint effort from the CNAF and the Chinese civilian airlines. A CAT C-46 and another from the CNAC is seen here at Mukden evacuating refugees. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

AA-MOC
HANKOW

The CAT named its aircraft after main Chinese cities, like the Hankow, a C-46 seen at Mukden in winter 1948. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

A group of American pilots from the CAT and CNAC taking their meal in a heated tent at Mukden before a flight back to Peiping and Tientsin. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Civilians lining up to board a CAT C-46 at Mukden bound for the relative security of Peiping. Some of them would be forced to flee again, making their ultimate journey into Taiwan a year later. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

the Lavochkin La-9s, Il-10s, Douglass A-20s and Tu-2s, used for the defence of the Soviet base.

The Soviets complained about being harassed by reconnaissance flights regularly carried out by USMC and US Navy aircraft based at Tsingtao (Quingdao), on the fringes of the Port Arthur airspace, which may explain their aggressive behaviour. The first incidents took place in the area as early as 29 August 1945. An American B-29 used for dropping supplies to Allied prisoner of wars (POWs) released from the Japanese internment camps in Manchuria, was attacked by a flight of Soviet Yak fighters. The damaged bomber made a forced landing near Kanko, Korea. The incident caused no casualties and the Soviets immediately apologised for the mistake.

To American protests, the Soviets countered that the operation had not been authorised by them and that a previous drop had nearly killed one of their officers. More likely, they considered the presence of the B-29s in airspace they considered as their own, as yet another provocative act, in addition to the dropping of several teams of the OSS in the Soviet controlled area of China.

Some Soviets viewed the air drops (with some justification) as merely a cover for conducting reconnaissance over Manchuria. Since the Japanese capitulation, the alliance between Moscow and Washington was now on the brink of ending. After the incident caused by the incursion of an American B-29 bomber into an airspace that the Soviets considered as their own, the Soviet forbade further evacuation of Allied POWs by air. Instead, they were forwarded towards Port Arthur in Soviet commandeered trains to then be picked up by US Navy ships.

However, as the Soviets continued to delay the evacuation of British and American POWs, it was decided to overfly Port Arthur in September, with no less than 100 aircraft operating from the carriers USS *Antietam* and USS *Cabot*. The Soviets finally allowed their departure onboard a hospital ship and two destroyers, escorted by four cruisers and five destroyers.

Nevertheless, the incidents continued and on 15 October 1945, a US Navy PBM-5 Mariner patrol plane, monitoring the repatriation of Japanese prisoners of war and civilians, was fired upon by Soviet fighters operating out of Port Arthur. However, the plane escaped undamaged. The Americans again protested but the Soviets retorted that it had flown inside the 12 mile limit established by an agreement between China and the Soviet Union.

On 26 February 1946, it was the turn of another US Navy PBM-5 Mariner of the VP-26 Squadron, operating from Tsingtao, to be fired upon by Soviet fighters. Washington explained it had lost its bearing and had buzzed the Soviet airfield near Port Arthur. Fortunately, yet again, the aircraft managed to escape with no casualties. The cat-and-mouse game continued and now extended throughout the shorelines of territories under Soviet control, from Manchuria to North Korea, up to the Soviet Far East around Vladivostok. The

CAT pilots reported to be harassed by Soviet fighters operating out of Port Arthur whilst cutting across the Gulf of Petchili (Bohai). Among them were the P-63 Kingcobras of the 718th Fighter Aviation Regiment shown in this picture. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

A Martin PBM-5 Mariner of the VP-41 seen moored at the entrance of the Tsingtao Harbor in 1948. The unit was relieved by the VP-46 in March 1949. Their aircraft regularly flew patrols along the Chinese coast up to Port Arthur and were regularly harassed by Soviet fighters based there. A Mariner of the VP-26 reported receiving firing warning shots on 26 February 1946 when it overflew the Soviet base. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

reconnaissance missions markedly increased in June 1948 when the locally based Soviet 39th Army carried out a series of combined exercises with the Soviet Pacific Fleet and the air force units of the Far East Military District, under the command of General S. A. Krasovsky.

For several months, most of CAT's activity was focused on the Manchurian front. In fact, CAT completed its contract with the National Resource Commission in late February, ahead of schedule and without incident. Working under a series of contracts with various Chinese government agencies, by 25 May, CAT had flown 2,210 tons of flour into Mukden and brought out 22,173 passengers, including 4,571 wounded soldiers. Despite all the efforts, the situation continuously worsened. The Communist forces led by General Lin Piao (Lin Biao) were preparing for the final assault. The Red General's forces comprised 54 divisions, 700,000 regular troops and 300,000 partisans, facing 44 Nationalist divisions with 550,000 troops.

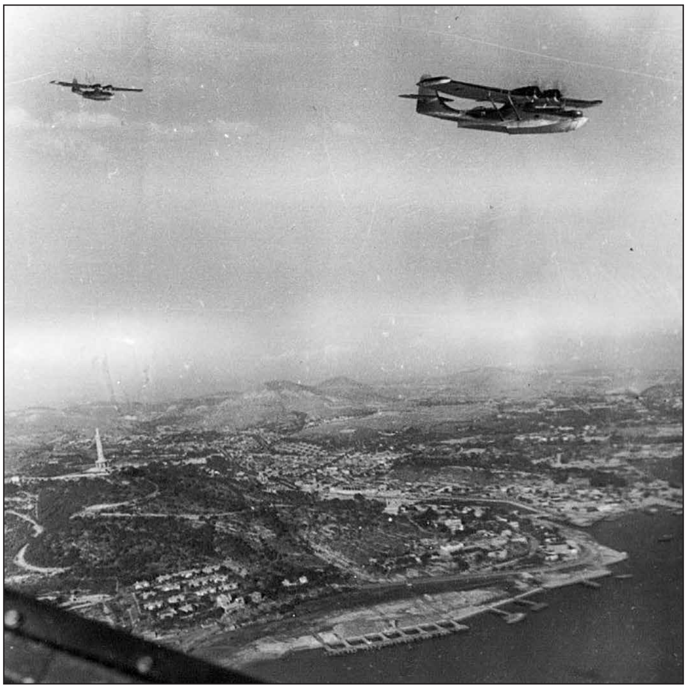
Urgent assistance requests were made to Washington but they resulted only in the delivery of unimpressive amounts of ammunition, together with 13 additional C-46s from US surplus. In April 1948, they were ferried by USAF pilots to Shanghai. Rather than handing them over to the Chinese Air Force, the Chinese administration leased seven of them to CNAC and six to CAT, possibly judging they would be put to a better use by the airlines.

At Mukden, the situation had become desperate. The 134,000 men of the garrison were just surviving thanks to the air bridge flown by the CNAF 10th and 20th Transport Groups and by CAT, CNAC and CATC. For example, in May 1948, the civilian airlines evacuated 7,000 Nationalist personnel and their families from the besieged area. The CAT made an average of 22 flights daily; CNAC, CATC and the CNAF made up of 50 flights each day.

For nine months, Chennault's men delivered 17,200 tons of supplies and evacuated 100,000 wounded and refugees. During a period of 20 days, during which CAT operated at its full capacity, 1,289 tons of supplies and 10,000 passengers were transported. The food situation at Mukden had become terrible and some cases of cannibalism were even reported. Starving soldiers fought each other over dropped food packages. Riot scenes had become common at the airport, where refugees and fleeing soldiers were trying to board the planes leaving the city. The CAT pilots were offered dollars, jewellery or gold for a seat. People frantically tried to get onboard and the crewmembers had to hit them to make them let go so the plane could take off.

Despite the appeals of the commander of the JUSMAG, General David Barr, asking the Nationalists to withdraw from Manchuria when it was possible, Chiang Kai Shek opposed the scheme until the very last, not willing to abandon the most industrialised part of the country. However, by September 1948, with the situation desperate, the Nationalists finally decided to pull out from Manchuria. The troops at Mukden received orders to break out, then moved southwards and reached the harbour of Yingkow (Yinkou), where the Navy would evacuate them. The local garrison commander received order to linkup with the withdrawing column arriving from Mukden. However, the Communists preempted the move and launched an attack against Yingkow and the port had to be reconquered.

During the nascent Cold War years, the US Navy maritime patrol squadrons equipped with Consolidated PB4Y Privateers based in Japan, with detachments in Philippines and China, skirted the Soviet Far East airspace around Vladivostok, but also at Port Arthur. This Privateer was seen during a refuelling stop in Hong Kong in 1949. (Albert Grandolini Collection)



The Soviets also flew maritime patrols to ascertain the US Navy deployments along the Chinese coasts, using Consolidated PBN-1 Nomads (Soviet designation KM-1 for this modified variant of the Catalina) operating from Port Arthur. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Simultaneously, KMT troops coming from Taiwan planned to land at Hulutao (Huludao) and prepared a second beach head to collect the retreating forces. Meanwhile, the Nationalists launched an offensive from Tientsin (Tianjin), aiming at opening a corridor to Mukden. Their progress was blocked at Shanhai Pass, south of Chinchow (Jinzhou), which was held by 200,000 Communist troops supported by 900 cannons and mortars.

The CNAF C-46s flew in 5,000 troops for reinforcement from Mukden but the column could not advance furthermore despite close air support provided by P-47s. Chiang Kai Shek took overall command of the operation and pressed his aviators hard to get proper air cover. Despite an unprecedented effort from the air force, particularly the P-51 Mustangs from the 4th Fighter Group, the operation failed, and Chinchow (Jinzhou) fell on 15 October after a hard-fought battle. The CNAF lost 15 aircraft in the last attempt to reopen a ground corridor linking north China to Manchuria.

The demoralising news reached the regional capital Changchun, where the garrison had been surrounded since May and was re-supplied only through insufficient airdrops. Reportedly, 300,000 people had already died of hunger. The US and British consulates and their personnel, as well as Western foreigners and missionaries, were evacuated by the USMC R5D-2 Skymasters of the VMR-153 operating from Tsingtao. A dispirited 1st Army Group started negotiating with the Communists and its 100,000 men defected with their artillery and some armoured vehicles three days later.

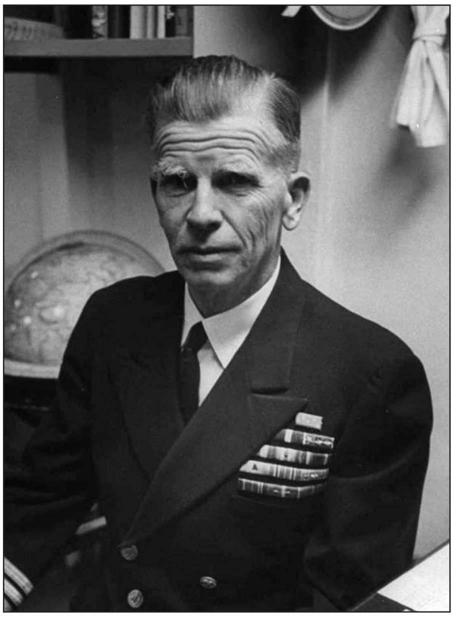
Ammunition airdrops by C-46s continued to re-supply the Nationalist troops engaged in battle to keep the remaining of the Liaoxi (Liaoning) province, but to no avail. In Mukden, all break out attempts were blocked by the Communists troops, numbering 200,000 men and supported by 40,000 men from the Korean Anti-Japanese Army from Manchuria and even by some North Korean specialists. On 29 October1948, CAT evacuated its remaining employees from Mukden (Shenyang) – the last airline to do so. The city fell two days later, the KMT lost 12 divisions, including those belonging to the elite New 1st Army, equipped with modern American equipment. Manchuria was definitely lost for the Nationalists.

13

TRAPPED IN WEI HSIEN

Whilst the fighting in Manchuria mobilised most of CAT's assets during 1948, the airline was also operating on other frontlines. During take-off from Tsinan (Xinan), CAT pilot Hughes saw his aircraft damaged by gunfire from machine guns positioned on the runway axis. His C-46 was hit several times in the nose and cockpit areas but miraculously he escaped injuries.

During March and April, the airline also regularly flew supplies into the Linfeng (Linfen) pocket, located in the Shansi (Shanxi) province. When the Communists managed to take control of the airport, located outside the city walls, the situation deteriorated rapidly and CAT employees found themselves trapped inside the city. To evacuate CAT staff, orders were given to Station Chief James R. Stewart to prepare a small airstrip that could accommodate light airplanes. With the Chinese Air Force unable to promptly carry out the evacuation, CAT's Eric Shilling was put in charge and a recently acquired Stinson L-5 was put at his disposal. Whilst his colleague James Bledsoe created a diversion by dropping anti-personnel bombs supplied by the Nationalists from the door of his C-46, Shilling came



US Navy Vice Admiral Oscar C. Badger, Commander of the Navy advisory team, agreed to hand over one of the USMC Stinson L-5 liaison planes based in Tsingtao to the CAT for the rescue operation at Wei Hsien. (US Navy)

into the city at extremely low altitude and managed to fly out the CAT personnel. Chennault vehemently denied Communist reports about 'a CAT bomber' operating over Linfeng. This successful evacuation foreshadowed an even more dramatic attempt.

The city of Wei Hsien (Weixian) was a railway hub strategically located on the line between Tsinan (Xinan) and Tsingtao (Quingdao), almost equal distance from both cities. The town was also infamously known for its Japanese concentration camp during the Second World War, where Western civilians caught in northern China were interned. Starting in September 1947, CAT provided a weekly service by means of two C-47s. Tsingtao was used by CAT as their headquarters for the northern part of China and allowed mail transfer to Shanghai and Nanking. This air link was vital for Wei Hsien as land and rail connections to the city were under Communist control.

On 11 April 1948, worried about the safety of his employees, CAT Area Manager, Lew Burridge, his assistant John R. Plank and pilot Edwin Trout, flew into the city to assess the situation. Whilst Edwin Trout returned to Tsingtao with the C-46, Burridge and Plank decided to stay for the night. During the following hours, the Communists made their move against the city, preventing any landing at the airport, which was located outside the city walls and eventually occupying the airport the next day. With employees trapped inside a surrounded city, CAT faced a similar situation as in Linfeng. General Chang Tien Tso, the garrison commander, ordered his men to prepare a 400-feet-long airstrip within the city's wall perimeter.

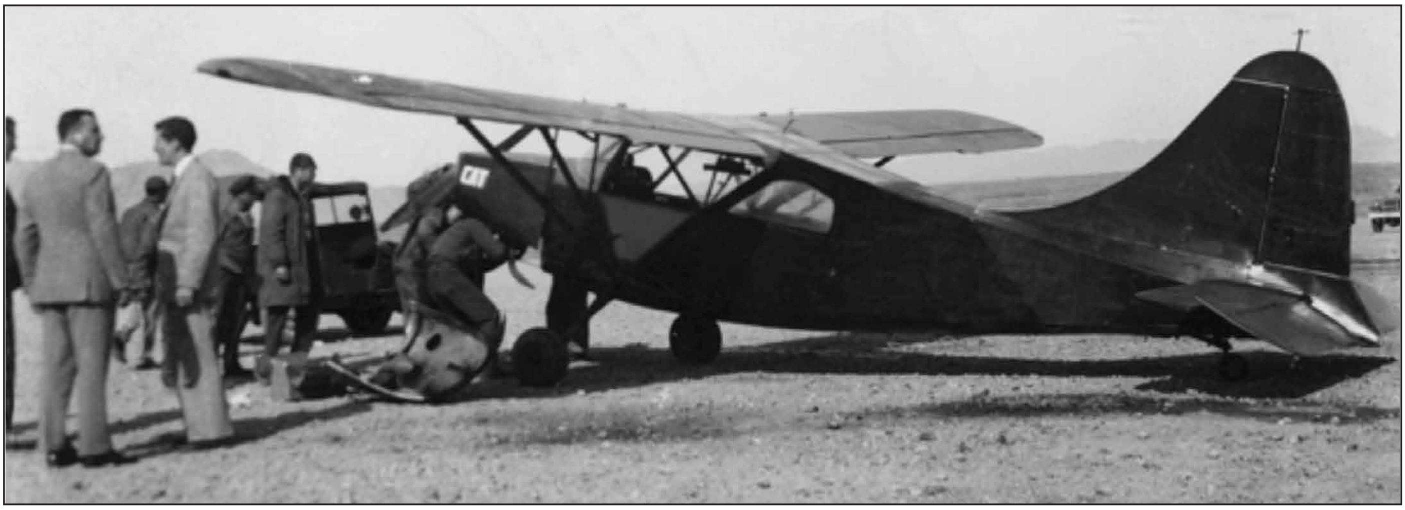
Lew Burridge, a former Marine pilot now serving with the CAT, asked the Marines based at Tsingtao, for help. His request was forwarded to the Commander of the Navy advisory team, Vice Admiral Oscar C. Badger, who was willing to help but was under strict orders to avoid actions that could be construed as intervening in the local civil war. Badger sought the advice of Consul Robert C. Strong. 'Burridge was not engaged in combat and had a right to protection as an American citizen', the diplomat reasoned.

When the Communist radio broadcast warned that all CAT employees in Weihsien would be shot after the city had been captured, Strong stated that 'because the aircraft would be used solely for the peaceful purpose of a rescue mission, the action should not constitute improper conduct'. Strong was also prepared to share the blame if the aircraft was shot down.

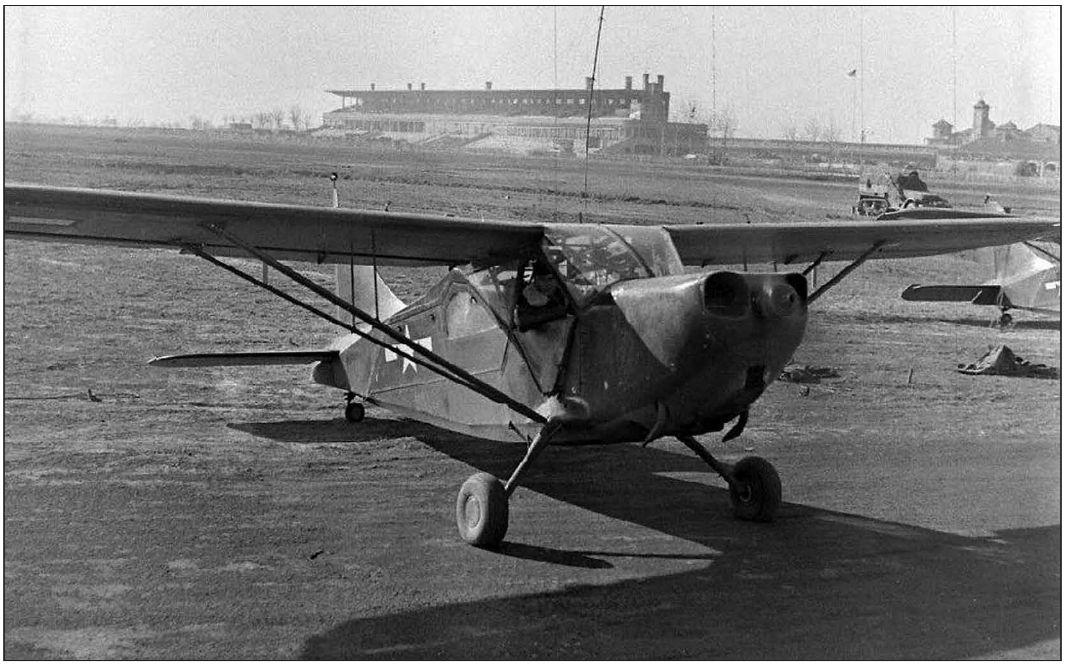
Consul Robert C. Strong at Tsingtao also politically backed the decision of Vice Admiral Oscar C. Badger to hand over an American military aircraft to CAT in April 1948. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Admiral Badger finally agreed to let CAT borrow one of their Stinson L-5 light aircraft, after they stripped it of all US military markings. Pilot Richard B. Kruske landed the L-5 on the small strip on 12 April; Burridge embarked, together with a sack of mail, but, during take-off, one wing hit an obstacle and the Stinson crashed. Fortunately, the two pilots on board were not hurt in the incident. A second CAT pilot, Roger Fraye, had also flown to Wei Hsien, but he damaged his wing tip while trying to land, reportedly because of wind conditions at the airstrip and had to return to Tsingtao.

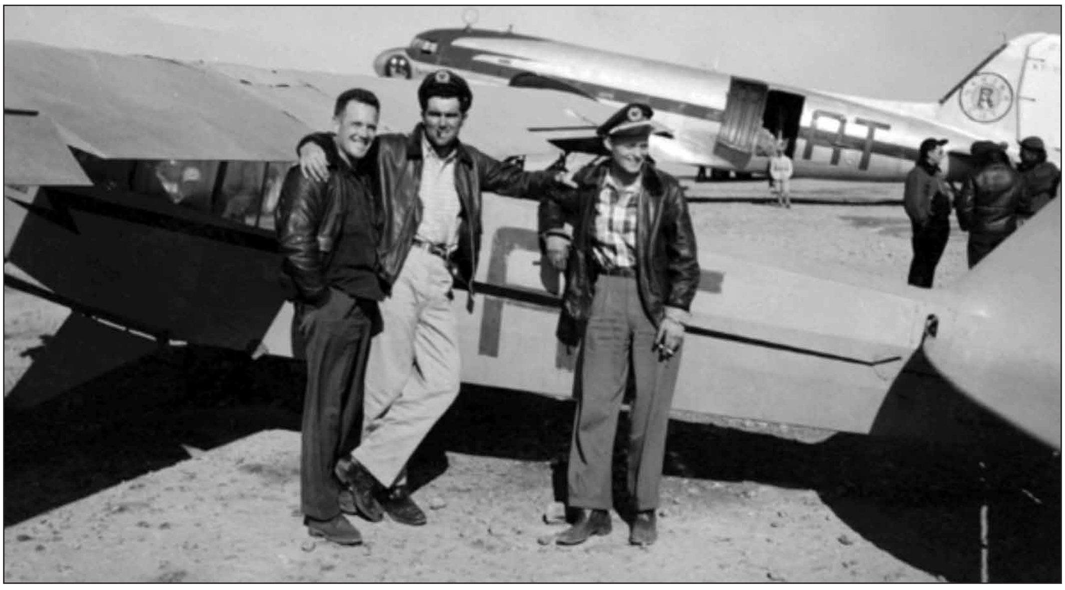
As night fell, the Communists launched an attack on the city. During the rescue operation, most of the time, CAT had one of their transport planes circling above the city to liaise with Tsingtao. That night, with Rousselot at the controls, CAT's C-47 dropped flares over the Communist troops, together with empty air bottles. The whistling sound the bottles made when dropping, had the attackers look for cover thinking they were incoming bombs.



The handed over L-5 had all its American military markings painted out, even its serial number. Only the CAT inscription was painted on its nose. Whiting Willauer, first from left and Lew Burridge seen beside it at Tsingtao during the Wei Hsien rescue operation. (UTD)



One of the USMC Stinson L-5 operating from Tsingtao in 1948. One of them was handed over to CAT to try to evacuate some pilots of the company trapped inside the besieged city of Wei Hsien in April 1948. (Albert Grandolini Collection)



The CAT also used one of its Piper L-4 during the Wei Hsien rescue operation. From left to right, John Plank, Bob Rousselot, and Marshall J. Stayner, just out of the besieged city before it fell into Communist hands. (UTD)

Meanwhile, at Shanghai, the CAT's own Stinson L-5 had been dismantled and loaded into a C-46 heading for Tsingtao. To bolster the rescue fleet, another L-5 was borrowed from a Chinese military unit, and the representative for Piper in China made a Piper Cub available.

At Wei Hsien, with Chinese help, the CAT staff had meanwhile cleared a wider second airstrip in the eastern part of the city. During the next four days, a series of attempts were made by various small airplanes flown by CAT pilots. A first attempt saw pilot Edwin L. Trout fly in another L-5 but damaged the propeller on landing. A CAT transport plane parachuted a spare propeller and the CAT team set to work. Once repaired, Lew Burridge and Richard Kruske managed to leave Wei Hsien.

Three additional small planes were flown into the city by Rousselot (L-5), Kruske (returning in an L-5), and Marshall Staynor (Piper Cub). The Piper Cub damaged a wheel on landing and needed repair. Kruske and Trout left in the first L-5, whilst Rousselot, having a larger build, decided to fly out with the less heavy Chinese mechanic Sun in the second L-5. However, their plane hit a brick wall on take-off. Luckily both men were unhurt but the Stinson was a total loss, forcing the three American pilots to spend another night in the besieged city.

The CAT heavier transport planes continued to circle over the city, dropping flares during the night. By the next day, the Piper's wheel had been repaired. Kruske came back with the airworthy L-5 and picked up Stayner, while Plank left with the repaired Piper, leaving Rousselot as the last Westerner in Wei Hsien. The following day, Kruske in the Stinson and Stayner in the Piper, returned to the city but the L-5 was heavily damaged on landing. Both pilots returned to Tsingtao and Rousselot remained.

On 16 April, Marshall Stayner in his Piper, did his best to evacuate CAT's staff. Rousselot was the last to leave and left behind three wrecked light airplanes. Part of the CAT Chinese staff made it through the Communist lines on foot with help from the locals. General Chang and his troops fought to the end and he was killed in the battle. The city eventually fell on 18 April.

14

TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE

As the CAT began its second life, Washington became alarmed by the deteriorating military situation in China and decided to restart its military assistance, albeit on a smaller scale. This was preceded by intense political infighting, with President Truman and the State Secretary Marshall, strongly against the decision. Both saw the KMT regime as corrupt and inefficient and wanted to pull out of China as quickly as possible. Marshall particularly, was weary of the Nationalist leaders after spending months in China in nerve wracking, infructuous negotiations.

As the Cold War gained momentum with the Soviet Union, Marshall preferred to redirect the United States resources towards an ambitious aid programme for western Europe reconstruction that bore his name. The new strategy was again Europe first, Asia later. On Asia's side, Chiang Kai Shek started an intense public relation campaign in Washington, carried out by his wife.

She contacted her old China lobby friends from the era of the war against the Japanese. They argued that China must benefit from the same new aid programmes granted to Greece and Turkey against the threat of communism. In July 1947, Truman sent an old China hand –General Wedemeyer – to Chunking to assess the situation and sound out Chiang Kai Shek.

Wedemeyer strongly recommended a resumption of aid, particularly a reinforcement of the CNAF and the completion of its transport plan, with two full groups on C-46s. He urgently asked for a wide reform of the armed forces by discarding many ineffective territorial units and organising a better logistic system, overseen by a reinforced American military advisory group. The programme sounded familiar to Chiang Kai Shek and resembled that which the former General Stilwell had requested.

Wedemeyer warned that without this, Manchuria could soon be taken over by the Communists, where a new 'communist Manchukuo' could be installed by the Soviet Union as a new 'satellite state'. He even suggested to Chiang Kai Shek to appeal to the United Nations to negotiate a cease-fire in Manchuria and place the area under an international trusteeship, including the United States, Soviet Union, Great Britain, France and China. The proposal was out rightly rejected by the Chinese who would not accept the loss of national sovereignty. The fall of Manchuria some months later, did not see Wedmeyer's fears of a massive Soviet involvement transpire but the area served as the rear base for Mao to prepare a new offensive against northern China.

This 're-built' B-25C, with B-25J engines, being prepared in San Francisco for its delivery to China in 1949. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

In April 1947, under pressure by the Republican Congress, President Truman asked for a grant to China of $463 million over a period of 15 months from February 1948 to June 1949. Of the total

The official lifting of the arms embargo from the Unites States in May 1947 allowed the resumption of aircraft deliveries to the CNAF. These mothballed P-51Ds and P-47Ds being prepared in San Francisco for their shipping to China. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

A small number of North American F-10s, the reconnaissance version of the Mitchell bomber, were acquired in 1948 to equip the CNAF 12th Reconnaissance Squadron. (Wings of China)

Some 100 additional C-46s were purchased for the CNAF in 1948. They were sorely needed when the tide of the war turned against the Nationalists and many encircled cities held only thanks to air bridges. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

amount, $338 million was to be used for economic aid and $125 million for military assistance. Of this $125 million, $87.5 million was for the Army, $28 million for the CNAF and $9.5 million for the navy. In May 1947, the United States officially lifted the arms embargo when the Chinese civil war resumed in earnest.

The resumed deliveries of spare parts allowed the CNAF to improve its operational readiness but the service eagerly awaited the resumption for the delivery of new batches of P-47 and P-51 fighters. By the end of 1948, there were 53 P-51Ds, 42 P-47Ds and 51 P-47Ns delivered. Another batch of 34 P-47Ns were received in early 1949. Additional P-51s were also delivered which brought the number of airframes available in September 1948 to 139, with 52 others in order. Some 29 B-24s were in service on the same date, with 37 others on order but eventually, never delivered. They operated alongside 24 B-25s and 150 Mosquitos.

The 10th and 20th Transport Groups continued to be reinforced with 45 C-47s, eight C-43s, one C-54, three C-87s and 126 C-46s in service in September 1948. At least 100 additional C-46s were delivered before the end of the year. Despite these new additions, the two transport groups could barely handle the minimum

CNAF Order of Battle – September 1948

1st Medium Bomber Group
3rd Medium Bomber Squadron (Peiping): 11 B-25s
4th Composite Bomber Squadron (Hankow): 4 B-25s – 36 Mosquitos
9th Medium Bomber Squadron (Hsian): 8 B-25s

8th Heavy Bomber Group
33rd Heavy Bomber Squadron (Shanghai): 9 B-24s
34th Heavy Bomber Squadron (Shanghai): 10 B-24s
35th Heavy Bomber Squadron (Shanghai): 10 B-24s – 2 C-87s

3rd Fighter Group
7th Fighter Squadron (Hsuchow): 11 P-51s
8th Fighter Squadron (Hsuchow): 10 P-51s
28th Fighter Squadron (Chinan): 10 P-51s

4th Fighter Group
21st Fighter Squadron (Peiping – Chinan – Mukden): 19 P-51s
22nd Fighter Squadron (Peiping – Chinan – Mukden): 18 P-51s
23rd Fighter Squadron (Peiping – Chinan – Mukden): 17 P-51s

5th Fighter Group
17th Fighter Squadron (Chinan): 20 P-51s
26th Fighter Squadron (Nanking): 17 P-51s
27th Fighter Squadron (Chinan): 17 P-51s
11th Fighter Group
41st Fighter Squadron (Taiyuan): 4 P-40s – 9 P-47s
43rd Fighter Squadron (Hsinhsiang): 10 P-47s
44th Fighter Squadron (Hsian): 10 P-47s

10th Transport Group
101st Transport Squadron (Shanghai): 25 C-46s
102nd Transport Squadron (Peiping): 20 C-46s
103rd Transport Squadron (Peiping): 20 C-46s
104th Transport Squadron (Nanking): 25 C-47s

20th Transport Group
2nd Transport Squadron (Shanghai): 20 C-46s
6th Transport Squadron (Shanghai): 20 C-46s
11th Transport Squadron (Shanghai): 20 C-46s
30th Transport Squadron (Shanghai): 20 C-46s

Independent Units
12th Reconnaissance Squadron: 11 F-5s – 4 F-10s

The order of battle did not take into account the numerous airframes held in reserve. The 11th Fighter Group saw its strength bolstered by deliveries of new Thunderbolts by early 1949, as well as the 1st Medium Bomber Group which integrated the DH Mosquitos and used them to partly replace its B-25s.

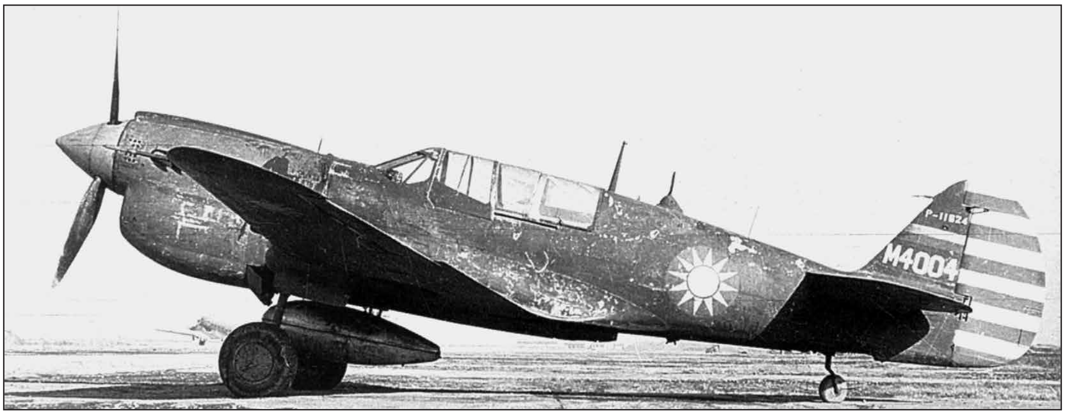
requirements of the armed forces. Some 488 trainers were also ordered to reinforce the current fleet of 14 PT-22s, 58 PT-19s, 90 PT-17s and 46 AT-6s. At least 56 Stinson L-5 liaison aircraft were added to the 11 already in service. Early in 1949, 17 Piper L-4s were supplied and four Cessna 195s late the same year.

Reports of CAT's growing participation in the civil war were met with concern through the Far Eastern division of the State Department. Its angry director, William McAfee wanted to retain the passports of the involved US airmen until they left China. However, following the 'middle way' policy of still supporting Chiang Kai Shek but not giving him too much aid, the Department did not immediately act. The JUSMAG had no illusion about Washington policy; moderate assistance would not be effective but would give the Communists the pretext to harass American citizens and property. In fact, it was hoped only that the current situation could be stabilised and save American prestige.

Meanwhile, the Nationalists had to abandon Chahar (Qahar) and Jehol (Rehe) provinces on the Inner Mongolian steppes. There, the Communists had taken control of 80 percent of a territory located too far away from other fronts and whose population's allegiances were not clear. The Reds had taken back Yenan (Yan'an), a place with a high symbolic value as it had been the 'capital' of the survivors of the Long March.

In May 1948, the first major offensive in the main Central Plain was directed to the city of Kaifeng, capital of Honan (Heinan) Province. The Communists deployed motorised infantry, supported by artillery and even some tanks captured from the Japanese. The CAT was called in to fly supplies to the 250,000-strong besieged garrison. At first, the company's C-46s could use the two airports but these soon came under artillery fire and had to be closed. The

The P-51Ds of the CNAF 5th Fighter Group were intensively engaged to counter the Communist's first offensive in central China in the spring of 1948. The noses of these aircraft seemed to be painted in red. (Albert Grandolini Collection)



By the spring of 1948, the CNAF 11th Fighter Group still continued to use a dwindling number of Curtis P-40s, like this P-40N shown. Newly delivered Thunderbolts would soon replace these. (Wings of China)

The Mosquito FB.26s of the 4th Composite Bomber Squadron were also heavily involved in the battle of Kaifeng. (Wings of China)

Maintenance on a CAT C-46 in 1948. In order to cut costs, Chennault contracted JAMCO of Hong Kong to overhaul the engines instead of sending them to the United States. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

CAT crews then paradropped the supplies over the city but then came under fire from increasingly dangerous anti-aircraft guns.

The CNAF 5th and 11th Fighter Groups, together with the Mosquito and B-25 bombers of the 1st Medium Bomber Group, were intensively engaged against the Communist troops but they could not stop their progression. On 19 June 1948, Kaifeng fell. Chiang Kai Shek ordered his troops to retake it. The 16th Army Group and the 5th Army, supported by CAT airdrops, counter-attacked and took the city back on 25 June. Unfortunately, the historic city suffered heavy damage due to bombardment by artillery and aviation. Despite the success, the daring communist attack on the very heart of KMT controlled territory in central China, operating on a quasi-conventional way, had a profound psychological impact on their adversaries.

Chennault and Willauer tried to cope with the deteriorating situation as best as they could. The rampant inflation was a growing concern as Willauer noted, 'It is practically impossible to tell how you stand other than to measure up from month to month what you have left in the bank and what you have been able to invest in one form or another'. They funnelled US dollars and gold through Hong Kong for transfer to the United States to keep minimum funds for continuing operations and to buy spare parts.

The process was later legalised when Chennault set up the International Suppliers' Corporation with the local Kincheng Banking Corporation which produced legal export certificates. In June 1948, Willauer also concluded arrangements for a 20 percent participation by CAT's American partners in the Jardine Aircraft Maintenance

The CAT pilots flew tirelessly to support the Nationalists troops and encircled cities despite the increasing efficiency of the communist anti-aircraft artillery. Pilot Richard B. Kruske seen here in the autumn of 1948 at Peiping. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Company (JAMCO) of Hong Kong – an investment that would prove highly profitable.

JAMCO had been organised in 1947, primarily to provide maintenance facilities for Hong Kong Airways and BOAC. In 1948, when the company decided to expand its facilities to include engine overhaul, Willauer grasped the opportunity to become a financial backer. CAT engines would no longer have to be crated and shipped to the United States for major overhaul, a lengthy and costly procedure ($4,000 to $5,000 each). Maintenance would be done in Hong Kong at a saving of $400 to $500 an engine. However, the investment in JAMCO turned out to be even more important than envisioned. In the 1949–1950 uncertain period, the aviation workshops in Hong Kong would be crucial for CAT's survival when Communist advances caused major dislocation of the airline's vital base maintenance facilities.

The Communist efforts also focused on Shantung (Shandong) Peninsula, where their guerrilla units already controlled most of the area, apart from the cities of Tsinan (Jinan) and Tsingtao (Quingdao). Tsingtao was the most important strategically because of its harbour and because it served as a base for the US Marines, with some 3,000 troops and 50 combat aircraft.

In February1948, an offensive had been launched against Tsinan and its 60,000-strong garrison. Following their usual tactic, the Nationalists decided to dig in and rely on aerial support rather than pulling out on positions that were easier to defend. From Tsingtao, the CNAF and CAT transport planes flew in an additional division. During this airlift, a CAT C-46 crashed on take-off at Tsingtao on 29 July1948, killing pilots Clyde T. Tarbet and Har Yung Shing, radio operator Chan Wing King, and 16 soldiers. An inquiry suggested that the ground crew may have forgotten to remove some flight control locks before take-off.

By mid-March, the Tigers had already flown 1,250 sorties and the rhythm of operations was continuously increasing. By 17 September, the Red troops had reached the outskirts of Tsinan (Jinan) airport. The CNAF and CAT flew in a division as reinforcement but to no avail. Wanting to avoid a new siege ending in disaster like Wei Hsien (Weixian), Lew Burridge ordered the evacuation of all CAT personnel. The next day, Pilot Eric Shilling was tasked with the job, but several of the employees were impeded in town, having failed to

The image shows one of the most experienced CAT pilots, Ernest W. Loane who fought in China with the AVG before flying for the CNAC when the unit was disbanded in July 1942. In September 1947, he was hired by CAT and stayed with the airline until the Communists took over China. After returning to the United States, he was hired by the Flying Tiger Line, founded by another former AVG pilot and flew as captain until retiring in 1977. He died a year later. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Another former AVG pilot was Eric Shilling who after flying with the CNAC until 1947, decided to join the newly established CAT. He followed Chennault into Taiwan in 1949 and continued to fly secret air operations over Communist China, Korea, and French Indochina. He was later involved in the CIA secret war in Laos and flew with Air America until 1967, being the last Flying Tiger still flying combat missions. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

CAT Fleet in June 1948

CNRRA closing shop at the end of 1947 meant the end of CAT as CNRRA Air Transport. However, in order to give the airline a second life and continue operations in China, Chennault and Willauer had approached the Chinese Civil Aeronautics Administration and a preliminary agreement was signed in January 1948 to let CAT, now Civil Air Transport, operate under the authority of the Ministry of Communications. Even though the final version of the contract with CAA-MOC was only signed in May 1948, CAT was able to continue its operations in China from early 1948 almost without interruption.

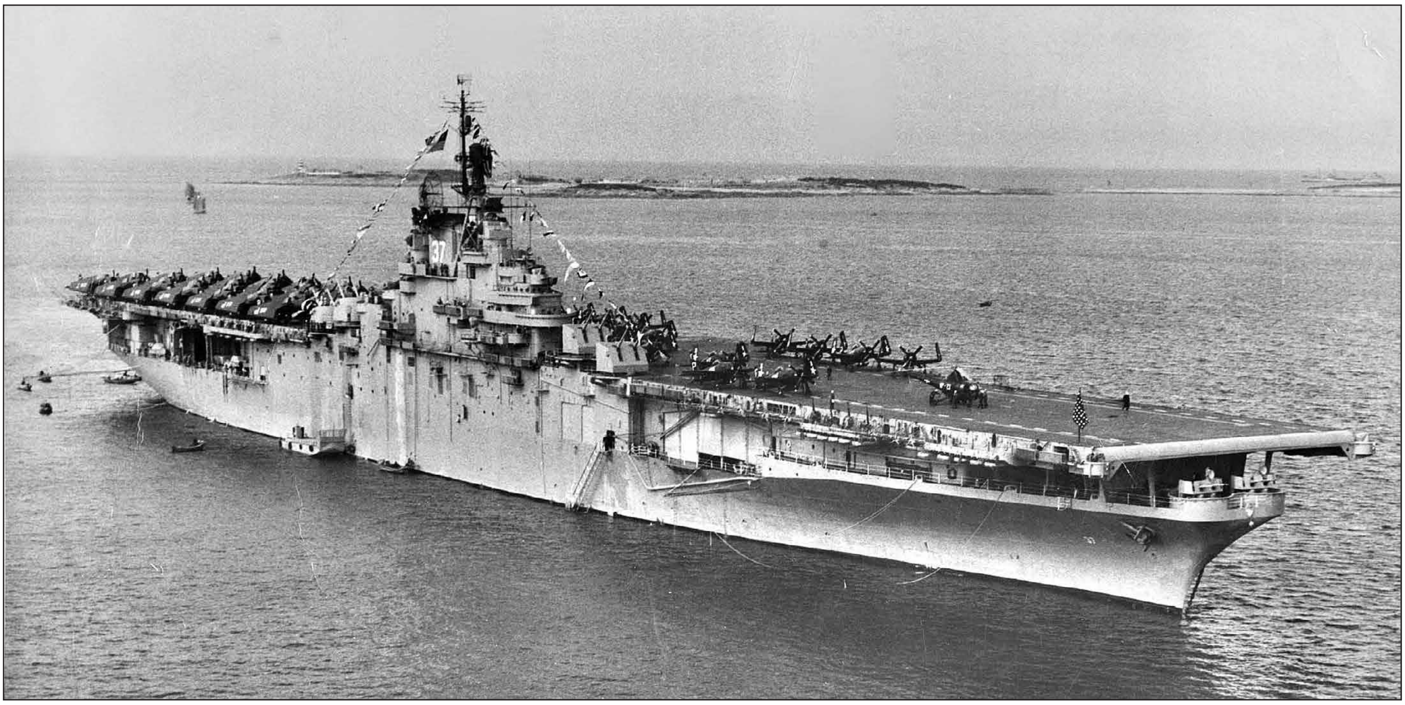
The markings carried by CAT aircraft were modified with a new tail logo in black and red, a double cheatline along the fuselage, top and bottom of the row of cabin windows and the full company name written in both English and Chinese on the fuselage sides. The large 'CAT' letters in red remained, but a Nationalist flag appeared on the rear fuselage, just before the stabilisers.

In May 1948, a batch of 15 surplus USAAF C-46s was made available to the Chinese government through the Foreign Liquidation Commission. The Nationalist CAA-MOC leased seven of them to CNAC and the remaining six to CAT. Most, if not all, of the additional C-46s were painted dark grey, and consequently received white CAT markings.

May 1948 also saw the introduction of new registrations starting with XT-8… The Piper Cub and the AT-6 were also registered; their previous registrations, if any, are unknown.

Changes to the CAT fleet that occurred in 1948 are indicated in the table.

Aircraft Type	Registration June 1948	USAAF Serial number	Previous registrations	Notes
C-47B	XT-801	43-16215	215, XT-T501 by late 1947	
C-47B	Prob.XT-803	43-16239	239, probably XT-T502	Scrapped 25 October 1948
C-47B	XT-805	43-49906	906, probably XT-T503 by late 1947	
C-46D	XT-802	44-78392	392, XT-T504 by late 1947	
C-46D	XT-804	44-78395	395, XT-T505 by late 1947	
C-46D	XT-806	44-78405	405, XT-T506 by late 1947	
C-46D	XT-808	44-78409	409, XT-T507 by late 1947	
C-46D	XT-810	44-78413	413, XT-T508 by late 1947	
C-46D	XT-812	44-78522	522, XT-T509 by late 1947	
C-46D	XT-814	44-78524	524, probably XT-T510 by late 1947	
C-46D	XT-816	44-78528	528, XT-T511 by late 1947	
C-46D	XT-818	44-78530	530, XT-T512 by late 1947	
C-46D	Poss.XT-820	44-78531	531, probably XT-T513 by late 1947	Wrecked on take-off from Taiyuan, 10 December 1948
C-46D	Poss.XT-822	44-78532	532, probably XT-T514 by late 1947	Deadly crash on take-off from Tsingtao, 29 July 48
C-46D	XT-824	44-78536	536, XT-T515 by late 1947	
C-46D	XT-826	44-78539	539, XT-T516 by late 1947	
C-46D	XT-828	44-78540	540, XT-T517 by late 1947	
C-46D	XT-830	44-78543	543, XT-T518 by late 1947	
C-46F	XT-44	44-78679	In USAAF service FLC	On lease from CAA-MOC
C-46F	XT-46	44-78638	In USAAF service FLC	On lease from CAA-MOC
C-46F	XT-48	44-78687	In USAAF service FLC	On lease from CAA-MOC
C-46F	XT-50	44-78703	In USAAF service FLC	On lease from CAA-MOC
C-46F	XT-52	44-78643	In USAAF service FLC	On lease from CAA-MOC
C-46F	XT-54	44-78547	In USAAF service FLC	On lease from CAA-MOC
Piper Cub	XT-883		Unregistered / unknown	
AT-6	XT-882		Unregistered / unknown	
Stinson L-5	Unknown		XT-T519 by late 1947	Possibly w/o following the daring evacuation of Weihsien in April 1948, or later in 1948



When the Communist forces took Tsinan in September 1948, the United States decided to reinforce its Tsingtao base when the surrounding countryside was infiltrated by Red guerrillas. The US Navy dispatched the carrier USS *Princeton* (CV-37) with its CVG-13 air group for a demonstration of force, with the VF-131 and VF-132 Squadrons on Grumman F8F-1 Bearcat fighters and the VA-15 and VA-135 Squadrons on Grumman TBM-3E/3Q Avenger torpedo-bombers. The ship is seen moored here at the entrance of the Tsingtao Harbor after a series of exercises just off the Chinese coasts. (US Navy)

secure a security pass to go to the airport. Shilling was only able to extract part of the maintenance team.

In the afternoon, Burridge made a second rotation and landed at Tsinan as the fighting was only two kilometres away. However, the airport was already under enemy artillery fire. The remaining employees managed to make it out of the city and embarked, along with panicked soldiers looking for a way out. With its employees rescued and the airport in enemy hands, CAT continued to drop rice and supplies for the city garrison. Despite this, the CNAF flew 520 tactical sorties during the last phase of the battle.

Tsinan fell on 27 September after the Nationalist division holding the western sector defected to the Communists. Chiang Kai Shek ordered the CNAF to bomb the city for three days, aiming at all military warehouses, factories and railroad stations but also causing numerous civilian casualties.

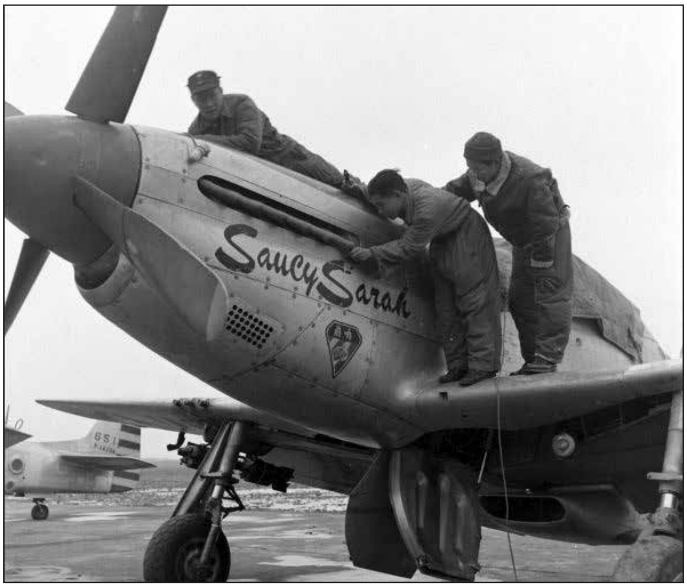
15

TAKING ALL RISKS

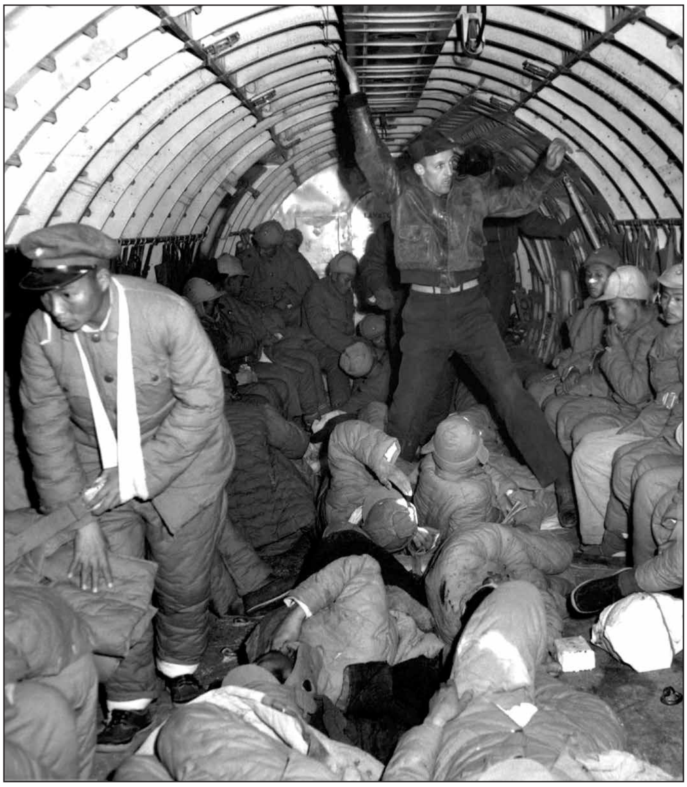
Meanwhile, the loss of Manchuria caused a wave of concern in the whole country. However, Chiang Kai Shek remained calm and decided to stake everything, convinced that he could beat his foe in a major battle on the Central Plain. He rallied all his remaining forces for a decisive confrontation that would stall the Communist's advance and seal the future of China. Four army groups, with a total of 600,000 troops, were deployed around the city of Hsuchow (Xuzhou), located on the Grand Canal and shielding Nanking (Nanjing) and Shanghai.

For his part, Mao rallied his troops from Manchuria and from the Northern provinces through forced marches. Northeastern Field Army Commander Lin Piao (Lin Biao) passed the Great Wall with 400,000 men and stopped his advance 70km short of Peiping to regroup. He left a column to harass the city, closing its airport, forcing the CNAF

The CNAF mobilised most of its assets to provide air support to the Nationalist armies during the huge Hsuchow Battle. These P-51Ds of the CNAF 5th Fighter Group are being prepared for another sortie against the converging communist columns in November 1948. (Albert Grandolini Collection)



Mechanics preparing a P-51D, armed with cluster-bombs under the wings, of the 5th Fighter Group at Peiping Airfield in November 1948. Note in the background, the tail of an F-6D reconnaissance version of the Mustang. (Albert Grandolini Collection)



CAT pilot Ernest W. Loane threads his way through a crowded C-46 as Nationalist soldiers are flown out from beleaguered Hsuchow. Many wounded arrived in a terrible state and many died en route. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

and CAT to operate from an improvised landing strip just outside the walls of the Forbidden City, near the Temple of Heaven. Overall, in preparation for the coming decisive battle, the Communists deployed over a million soldiers and partisans under the command of Chu Teh (Zhu De) that now were advancing along the valley of the Hwai River (Huai River).

All available assets of the Chinese Air Force were mobilised helped by the advice and logistic supervision of the American advisors of the Air Division of the JUSMAG, under the command of Brigadier General Charles E. Thomas. The Brigadier flew himself, onboard his own personal unarmed B-17, to assess the situation. During several weeks, some 400 to 500 combat sorties were flown per day to prevent or delay the deployment of the Communist units. Raids by Mustangs and Thunderbolts from the 3rd, 4th and 5th Fighter Groups caused heavy casualties among the Red troops progressing on the vast bare plain, but the columns continued to move stoically under the strafing.

The Nationalists used all available civil and military transport planes to ferry troops and ammunitions to the two airports of Hsuchow (Xuzhou). The CNAC carried rice into the city and evacuated wounded soldiers to Nanking. The airline made 33 flights with 46 to 60 casualties per trip in a single day. The CAT mainly airlifted troops, ammunitions and food to the city. During December 1948, the CAT's activity would reach record figures; with over a million ton-miles airlifted, the CAT became the world's third ranking 'civil' freight airline.

On 8 November 1948, the Communists took the initiative and launched an assault on the eastern perimeter. A Nationalist counter-offensive by 15 divisions was making extremely slow progress as the Communists had turned every village into a fortified position, forcing the KMT troops to use their artillery or call for air support to clear their path. Despite the heavy involvement of the CNAF, the 7th Army Group was surrounded in the eastern sector and eventually wiped out on 22 November by a Communist push with armour support.

By end of November, the Nationalist forces had tightened their defence lines around Hsuchow (Xuzhou) after pulling back along pre-established routes. When 12 regiments defected to the Communists, the airport located in the south appeared lost but the 12th Army Group managed to hold the position. However, the communication lines with the city and the depots inside the city were cut. Moreover, the airport had come under artillery fire and could no longer be used. Most of the wounded had to be evacuated from the other airport.

The CAT crews were shocked by the number of wounded and appalled by the poor medical care they received: many wounds were not even thoroughly cleaned or bandaged and no morphine was available. The wounded were piled up in trucks, in the stench of gangrened limbs and many of them died en route. Chennault ordered a field medical station to be set up at Shanghai's Hungjiao airport. The CAT's doctor, Tom Gentry, worked around the clock, trying to alleviate the suffering of the evacuated soldiers and deal with the absence of a proper Chinese medical organisation but the assistance they received in Shanghai, often came too late.

On 30 November, with his air bridge in danger, Chiang Kai Shek decided to withdraw his troops before the Communists were able to surround them. The three remaining army groups were instructed to push south. To collect them and support the break out, the 6th Army Group was to move northwards from the Yangtze (Yangzi) River Valley.

On 10 January1949, all semblance of discipline had vanished at Hsuchow airport. Officers and soldiers were pushing the wounded aside and forcing their way into the airplanes. A soldier running in panic was hacked to death by the blades of a CAT C-46. Pilot Stuart E. Dew struggled to close the cargo door of his C-46 as soldiers desperately clung to it. He had to hit them, first with his fists, then with a steel bar. Eventually, his co-pilot rushed to the cockpit and put the left engine full throttle to literally, blow the soldiers away from the aircraft's fuselage. Eventually Dew managed to take off with 80 wounded and refugees on board. It was the last aircraft to leave the city. Hsuchow fell the next day.

A general view of the parking area of the CAT at the Peiping airfield at the end of 1948. Operating from this field, as well as Shanghai and Nanking, the C-46s flew non-stop missions to support the Nationalist troops trapped at Hsuchow. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

The Communists also encircled Peiping, shelling its airfields, forcing both CAT and the CNAF to operate from an improvised landing strip just outside the walls of the Forbidden City, like this Chinese C-47 of the 10th Transport Group. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

The fallback operation rapidly turned into a fiasco, with Nationalist columns being attacked and isolated. Some columns, cut from the main body of troops, ended up forming pockets of resistance fighting for survival. One such pocket located west of the city, was manned by 200,000 troops, whilst two others, including respectively 100,000 and 90,000 men, were located south of the city. The CAT was tasked with the impossible mission to re-supply them. Since December, the airline could only assign an average of 10 C-46s per day to the task.

Operating from Shanghai and Nanking, the CAT crew completed up to four runs a day, taking many risks as they dropped their cargo, mainly rice, from an altitude of only 2,000 feet, well within range of the Red anti-aircraft artillery. Many aircraft were hit, but luckily none was lost. The airdrops started riots on the ground as starving Nationalist troops fought to get their share of the supplies. Eventually, many Nationalist columns, exhausted and demoralised, either surrendered or joined the Communists. The rescue column coming from the south failed to break into the Communist lines, and the Nationalist pockets fell one after the other, between 10 and 15 January. During the battle that lasted from 23 November until 15 January1949, the CAT aircraft airlifted 37,136 passengers, 135 tons of ammunition and 1,501 tons of rice and biscuits.

After what was called the Huai Hai Campaign disaster, it looked as if nothing could stop the Red tidal wave anymore. The 25 divisions of General Fu Tso Yi (Fu Zuoyi) defending the sectors of Kalgan (Zhangjiakou), Tientsin (Tianjin) and Peiping (Beiping) either surrendered or defected to the Communists. The latter occupied Peiping and made it their capital, giving back the old name of Peking (Beijing)

16

OPERATION DEMONSTRATION

Chennault decided to regroup most of the CAT's assets at Canton (Guangdong) as operations from northern China now became too hazardous. To move the technical installations from Shanghai, on 15 February 1949, a LST ship was purchased and was turned into a mobile repair workshop. Inside were installed various shops for the engine build-up and propeller, carburetor, hydraulics and others.

The Governor of the Shansi Province, Yen Hsi Shan, posing here at his desk with a signed portrait of his friend Claire Lee Chennault who had helped to keep his province free during the Second World War. He is showing a stack of cyanide pills for use if caught by the Communists. Seeking help in Nanking, he was stranded there when the Reds finally took the encircled enclave of Taiyuan. Most of his collaborators and Japanese mercenaries took their own lives. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

The enclave of Taiyuan was defended by the CNAF 11th Fighter Group, with Thunderbolts operating from Peiping and Sian. A pilot of the unit posing with one of the newly acquired P-47N. (Wings of China)

Civil servants and refugees fearing the arrival of the Communists, were evacuated by CAT airplanes to the south of the country. Some of the best military units were also flown to Taiwan, where the KMT was establishing a stronghold.

Most of the Nationalist navy and air force were also sent to Taiwan. According to an American Intelligence report, only parts of the 1st Medium Bomber Group (Nanking and Hankow), 3rd Fighter Group (Nanking) and 5th Fighter Squadron (Nanking and Canton) were still based on the mainland. The CAT participated in this CNAF redeployment by ferrying factory machinery from the Kunming aircraft factory to Taichung, Taiwan. From a commercial point of view, the year had been the best so far for CAT: 223,700 passengers and 88,288 tons of cargo had been transported, with a total of 34 million miles flown. However, this was not matched by financial success as the Chinese currency continued to collapse.

Dispirited at first, Chennault tried to bolster the morale and fighting spirit of the Chinese leaders. In fact, for months, the man who had shaped part of the political events of the area, did not sit idle and witness the collapse of the Nationalists. He now advocated a more direct intervention from the United States. Chennault went to the US in March 1948 to testify before the House Committee on International Relations that the US government had to increase military aid to China.

At the time, Washington had focused all its efforts on the consolidation of Europe as tensions rose with the Soviet Union. Due to the imbalance of forces in favour of the Soviets, the American planners were very pessimistic about the chances of holding western Europe in case of a new war with Moscow. Chennault argued that instead of planning to deploy American strategic bombers in United Kingdom and North Africa to strike the industrial heart of the Soviet Union, which was in the Urals, it would be more convenient to keep the Chinese airbases as starting points. He indicated that bombers operating from western China would have to fly only half the distance compared to bombers operating from North Africa. Furthermore, the air defence network in the eastern part of the Soviet Union would be less dense than in the western part of the country. A point that won over the Pentagon as he claimed the Chinese were not opposed to deploying US bombers in China if a requirement was made.

To safeguard what was left of Nationalist China, Chennault pleaded for an urgent military and economic aid package of $1.5 to $2 billion to maintain a strong anti-communist block in China. The aim was to secure an anti-communist regime in southern and western China, a kind of partition of the country similar to Korea or Germany. He also requested lifting the ban that prohibited the deployment of the US advisors on the field whilst the Chinese units were currently involved in the

Chennault's scheme for Operation Demonstration was to put into use when some 10 P-47Ns were transferred from the CNAF. By that date, most of the Chinese aircraft had been transferred to Taiwan – intended to be the last bastion of Nationalist China. (Wings of China)

A general view of the civilian side parking at Peiping where these C-46s of the CAT and the CATC were prepared for another logistic run to Taiyuan. When Peiping fell, the CAT transport aircraft were forced to operate from the further airfields of Tsingtao and Shanghai, in trips of more than six hours. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

A view of the parking area of Taiyuan from the cockpit of a CAT C-46. In the background are two other CNAF C-46s which had just landed and an army truck heading for unloading. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

fighting. He felt they would be more efficiently used than currently 'to give lectures in classrooms in Nanking, while the Chinese armies are fighting thousands of miles away, with no one to supervise the flow of supplies, military services, commissary, or anything of that kind'. Otherwise, there would be 'the greatest failure of American policy in all our history'.

Nevertheless, Chennault met strong opposition, particularly from the State Department, which saw no reason to continue to support a perceived corrupt, inefficient and crumbling Chinese government. Some even considered Mao Tse Tung (Mao Zedong) to be more a Nationalist than a real Communist. The communist propaganda and an application of a moderate agenda on the economic reforms in the areas under their control, had left that impression. Chennault's opponents at the State Department claimed that Mao was forcibly fighting to restore full Chinese sovereignty and that he would never accept being under direct Soviet control. They thought that Mao was a kind of 'Tito of Asia', a prediction that would be confirmed a decade later when Mao definitely broke with Moscow.

Although not clearly perceived as such, the old, strong feud between Chennault and Marshall since the former came to China 10 years earlier, did not help to settle the situation From the start, Marshall despised the maverick who was again, trying to revive his strategy of secret air wars.

Despite obtaining nothing from his trip in Washington, Chennault persisted and in April 1948, asked Whiting Willauer, vice president of CAT, to tell the American ambassador to China, John Leighton Stuart, that he was planning to create another AVG, backed by a sizeable transport force and that would have a great impact on the course of the civil war. This first inquiry received only a mitigated answer as the diplomat forwarded the proposal to Washington. Meanwhile, Chennault tried to rally some key Chinese officials and officers to his scheme.

In November, Major General C.C. Liang of the Nationalist Army, went to Peiping to discuss the matter with General Fu Tso Yi (Fu Zuoyi), Commander-in-Chief of the 'Bandit Suppression Forces' in north China. With well-equipped troops, General Fu Tso Yi oversaw the defence of Peiping, Kalgan, Tientsin and Suiyan. After learning that Fu Tso Yi had an interest in the establishment of an organisation developed out of CAT (similar to the former AVG), Liang arranged a meeting with Fu for the CAT officials. During the conference, Fu was very positive about this programme and promised to encourage Chiang Kai Shek to invite Chennault to restore the 'Flying Tigers'.

Chennault was quickly received by the Chinese leader for discussing the possibility of the revival of the AVG. Chennault boasted that a relatively small, balanced force of fighters and bombers under his control, would halt the Communist drive. He also claimed that all pilots flying for the CAT were former military aviators and that over 100 ex- 14th Air Force pilots, with whom he was in touch, had expressed a willingness to serve the new AVG. Although Chiang Kai Shek was interested in the reestablishment of AVG, he pointed out that the Nationalist government did not have the funds available for the establishment of such a group. If such a group were formed, it

With the airfields of Taiyuan under enemy artillery fire, the transport aircraft were ordered to drop their supplies at low level directly inside the protected perimeter of the city, like this C-46 that had lowered his landing wheels and flaps to slow down as much as possible in order not to disperse the dropped bundles. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

would have to be at the expense of the US government. Knowing the reluctance in the United States, Chennault was, however, ready to return to Washington to convince the American government before it was too late.

The excellent Communist Intelligence had also heard of the plan and their propaganda organ used it to attack Washington. Communist radio announced on 26 November 1948:

> Notorious American aggressor against China, Chennault, dares plan organisation volunteer air force to fight the Chinese people. This plan has already been presented to Chiang Kai Shek and Fu Tso Yi. During its existence Chennault's air transport force CAT has already joined the Kuomintang air force and, moreover, already gave effect to plan of slaughtering the people. This makes clear American imperialistic government is just tolerating these actions of slaughtering Chinese people. The Chinese People's Liberation Army propose to end such actions.

Meanwhile, in parallel to the trying to revive the AVG for a combat outfit, Chennault also tried to get support from the US government to expand the 'civilian' transport component operating in China. Just before the end of the Second World War, in December 1944, the United Sates invited a Chinese delegation to attend the International Civil Aviation Convention in Chicago. The purpose was to reorganise the civilian transportation system after the conflict. The Americans hoped to maintain a dominant position on this field in the Chinese market. An agreement was signed in December 1946, which stipulated that the American airline companies would have the primacy to serve China international routes.

To help the Chinese, the American also envisaged sending a civil air mission to China. During his staying in China, Marshall asked Major General John P. Lucas, Chief of the US Army Advising Group, to prepare a survey of civil aviation in China. However, a memorandum prepared by the commander of the Air Division, Brigadier General J.P. McConnell, was only completed at the end of 1947. It recommended the appointment of a Civil Aviation Advisor to China, by the US government. On 27 January1948, the Smith-Mundt Bill was passed in Congress and approved by President Truman. Under the provision of this bill, the American Civil Aeronautics Administration was authorised to send a civil air mission to China at the expense of the US government. This mission was to be available to China in late summer or early autumn of 1948.

The Civil Aeronautics Administration agreed with the Chinese government that the man chosen for the post for commanding the mission should be 'a top-flight man with broad experience in both civil and military aviation as the chief of this proposed technical assistance to China'. However, with the military failures of the Nationalists in spring, the American ambassador Stuart, in April urged the White House to send the long awaited civil air mission to China as early as possible because of the 'importance of the civil air transport industry not only to the general economic life of the country as a whole, especially in view of the lack of alternative modes of transport, but also as an important adjunct to the military forces has been recognized'.

Nonetheless, Washington failed to send this air mission due to a deteriorated military situation. Although no name was given to who should occupy the post of 'Civil Aviation Advisor', it seems tailored for Chennault. Chiang Kai Shek had likely wanted to give the post to the loyal American retired general. In that position, he would coordinate the whole logistic air operations for the Chinese Army, having the necessary authority and charisma over the Chinese officers. However, Chennault serving de facto as the CNAF officious Chief of Staff, would not happen again.

Still resolved to carry on his duty with the CAT, Chennault constantly urged the Chinese to hold the lines and carry the fight. Their troops could still hold out in the south and in some parts in the west of the mainland. Among the regions that were still considered defensible was the enclave of Taiyuan, located in the prosperous Shansi (Shanxi) province. It was an important industrial hub, housing a steel mill, a factory building railway locomotives and the most important weapons factory in China that produced guns and cannons. The area was protected by 9,000 pillboxes and numerous pieces of artillery. The governor, Yen Hsi Shan (Yan Xishan), even had his own praetorian guard with 10,000 Japanese soldiers and auxiliary troops under the command of Japanese former General Hosaku Imamura. Air support was provided by the 11th Fighter Group, equipped with P-40 and P-47 fighters.

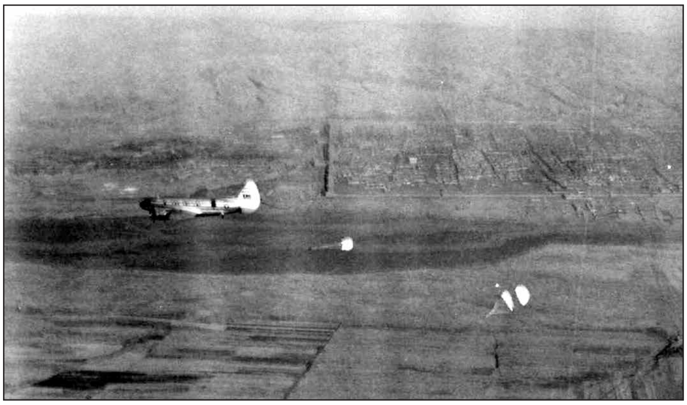
For over a year, the land and railway routes to the city had been cut. In May 1948, a Red offensive had been repelled but in December, Communist units had surrounded the city and their artillery was intermittently shelling the air base. The city's survival depended entirely on the air bridge where cotton, tobacco and iron ore were flown in. Chemical products, cement, weapons and steel

The main airport of Taiyuan was also under enemy artillery fire and the air bridge shifted to two smaller airfields but they were soon also shelled. The Communists also ringed the city with anti-aircraft guns, like these Japanese-built Type 88 75mm guns. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

bars were exported in the same manner. Chennault was ready to try anything to help his old friend, Governor Yen. He went straight to the commander of the Chinese Air Force, General Chou Chih Jou and proposed that he organise a fighter group manned by 'American volunteers'. With the help of Chief Pilot Bob Rousselot and Operations Manager Joe Rosbert, Chennault had already picked a first batch of 'volunteers' who all had some previous experience flying combat aircraft.

In January 1949, the Chinese agreed in principle to 'Operation Demonstration'. The plan consisted of making some 10 P-47N fighters available to CAT, to be based à Hsian (Xian), 580km south of Taiyuan. American pilots would be tasked with attacking the Communist positions around the Taiyuan airport, including using the newly delivered Napalm bombs. They would carry out two missions per day with six Thunderbolt fighters per mission, over a period of three days. It was forecast that afterwards, with the surroundings of the airport free of enemy troops, the fighters would be able to operate directly from the airport. Chennault was convinced that the operation would bolster the morale of the Nationalist troops. However, before 'Demonstration' could start, the American Consul in Shanghai, made aware of the scheme, intervened and strictly forbade any involvement of American citizens in combat operations.

Whatever Chennault's true motive for organising the project, which he knew would likely be disapproved by the American government, his action rang alarm bells up through Washington. Stubbornly, he had shown he was still resolved to raise another AVG and more importantly, he had the support of the Chinese top officials. The failed Operation Demonstration opened a new cycle of negotiations between the Chinese and Americans regarding whether or not Washington would, in the end, support Chennault's point of view.



With increasing anti-aircraft artillery fire, it became hazardous to drop supplies at low level. The transport aircraft resorted to parachutes even if many bundles drifted away into the Communist lines. Here, a CNAC C-46 is making a dropping run over the shrinking defence perimeter. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Meanwhile, the needs of the troops defending Taiyuan amounted to 5,000 tons of rice per month, not including ammunition and other supplies. Some 12 C-46s from CAT, 10 from CNAC, and eight from CATC were involved in the air bridge. After the fall of Tientsin (Tianjin) and Peiping (Beiping), re-supply operations had to be conducted from Tsingtao (Quingdao). Each trip now required six hours and the volume of supplies delivered dropped consequently. On 26 December, instead of the planned 200 tons of rice, only 22 tons were delivered, and only 45 tons the following day.

A new hurdle appeared for the air bridge when the Chinese government did not pay the 100 million Chinese dollars owed to CAT. Some pilots had not been paid for three months and the Chinese mechanics at Tsingtao went on strike because their salaries were irregularly paid. For a brief moment, a dejected Chennault considered selling the airline and quit but he found motivation in the loyalty of his crews and the calls for help from his friend

If the long transit flights towards Taiyuan exhausted the CAT crews, it was also the case for the Chinese Nationalist soldiers who flew with them to manhandle the bundles to be parachuted. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Governor Yen convinced him to continue in what was becoming a crusade for China.

The pilots landing at Taiyuan reported increased difficulties and danger. On 14 January, Roy Watts was targeted by mortar rounds immediately after landing, forcing him to take off again. A second attempt in the afternoon was cancelled. Two days later, the C-46 flown by Ernest W. Loane came back riddled with shrapnel. On 21 January, Whiting Willauer decided to assess the situation by himself but his aircraft could not land as the main airport and the auxiliary airstrips were all under enemy fire. A second attempt by night also failed; no airstrip could be spotted because of the black-out. Eventually, on 26 January, Chief Pilot Rousselot flew Willauer into the city, accompanied by a second C-46 piloted by Richardson.

As Willauer had travelled to convince Governor Yen to blow up the arsenal and the locomotive factory, both planes were filled with explosives. He then would regroup his forces for a breakthrough and head towards Paotow, 250 miles to the northwest. CAT would drop rice along the way and provide airlift from Paotow. Yen, however, refused to abandon his city and the Americans rapidly made it back to their planes before Communist artillery was able to destroy them on the ground.

Between the middle of December and the end of January 1949, CAT averaged 28 flights daily and airdropped or landed 1,869 tons of food and 14 tons of miscellaneous cargo. On 10 February, operations were halted at Tsingtao (Quingdao) due to lack of fuel. Governor Yen had to intervene to have 700,000 gallons of fuel transferred from the Chinese Air Force to CAT. Despite terrible weather conditions, with snow and icy conditions, the flights did resume on 26 February 1949, originating from Shanghai. The CAT air crews were again fully committed and flew to the limit of exhaustion. The 'champion' was Randall S. Richardson, who, on 3 March, flew for 21 hours and 45 minutes. It was not uncommon for pilots to spend 18 hours in their cockpit.

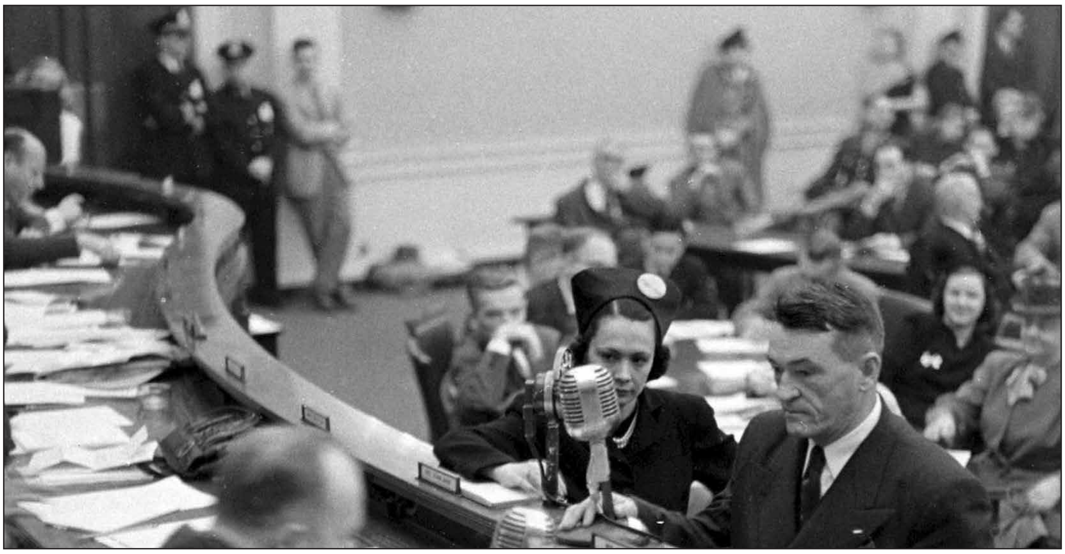
The situation worsened in March when the Communists managed to occupy the air base. The airplanes now had to use two secondary airstrips, numbered 7 and 8 and built on the western bank of the River Fen. Because artillery bombardment became heavier, the crews mainly resorted to airdrops, sometimes by night. On 8 March, Pilot James B. McGovern experienced engine trouble and had to land. He and his crew were rapidly picked by fellow pilot John Plank. The next day, a spare engine was flown in from Shanghai with a team of mechanics. Under the protection of Nationalist counter-battery fire, the team worked all day to replace the damaged engine. The stranded airplane eventually left, with a new engine and around 50 shrapnel holes.

Despite the heroic efforts of the defenders and re-supply crews, the Communist troops made continuous progress. On 20 April, the final assault was launched. At that time, Governor Yen was in Nanking requesting more supplies. When he heard about the assault, he asked to return to his city but the Chinese Air Force would not make a plane available to him. He then turned to CAT. When told that it was too risky, Yen reportedly proposed to purchase an airplane from CAT, or to be dropped by parachute (at 66 years of age!) over the city.

Chennault gathered all his assets and managed to make four additional C-46s available for the air bridge. They carried out 28 airdrops per day. Chinese B-24s also dropped ammunition containers packed into their bomb bays. Due to increasing anti-aircraft fire, which now included Japanese 75mm AA guns, the dropping altitude had to be changed from 11,500 to 15,000 feet, forcing the pilots to use oxygen masks. As the defence perimeter kept shrinking every day, more and more packages fell into enemy hands. After five days of bloody street fighting, the city of Taiyuan fell on 24 April 1949. The Japanese guards of Governor Yen fought to the end. Many of the guards and many Chinese leaders committed suicide. With the fall of Taiyuan, the province of Shansi (Shanxi) fell under Communist control.

17

FIGHTING A LOSING BATTLE



Chennault toured his former Second World War contacts in government, Pentagon and Congress in the United States at the end of 1948 and in May 1949, to seek support for China. Here testifying before the House Committee on International Relations. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

By spring 1949, in a spectacular reversal of the situation and in a little over two years, the Nationalists had suffered a series of catastrophic defeats that saw the wiping out of nearly 40 percent of their forces, losing 1.5 million men, whilst the Communists saw their strength increased by a half to reach 1.6 million of regular troops. The Reds claimed to have captured 86 CNAF aircraft, in addition to 15 others that had defected. The CNAF sank to a lower ebb, with only 401 aircraft available in January 1949, including 148 fighters, 91 bombers and 162 transports. Japan's surrender gave the CNAF a sense of relief and a feeling of having accomplished a mission but the morale of the Nationalist pilots continued to decrease at great speed. The Chinese pilots, hoping for a rest, disliked the civil war that had started a new cycle of violence. Like the majority of the population, they were weary of a situation where the country was again plunged into the chaos of a seemingly never-ending war since the fall of the Imperial dynasty in 1911.

In addition, the Communists began to penetrate the CNAF by recruiting members and inciting pilots to desert. A similar effort was carried out with the Chinese Nationalist Navy with a spectacular result when its flagship, the cruiser *Chungking*, the former Royal Navy HMS *Aurora* of the Arethusa-class, defected on 25 February 1949. However, she was later sunk on 18 March in the port of Hulutao (Huludao) by a raid of eight CNAF B-24Ms after being spotted by a CNAF F-5 Lightning in a reconnaissance mission.

As previously noted, Chiang Kai Shek had sent his wife to Washington in December 1948 to seek an additional American aid package. He hoped to capitalise on the sympathy she had with the American public at large during the Second World War. However, this time, she found most doors closed and had to wait 10 days before President Truman received her. Truman reaffirmed to her that he had suspended the ambitious plan of reconstruction of China due to the deteriorating situation there.

Following political dissent within the Kuomintang, Chiang Kai Shek resigned in January 1949 from his position as president but remained the commander of the Nationalist armed forces. The new government, led by Li Tsun Jen (Li Zongren), opened negotiations with the Communists after a truce was agreed along the Yangtze (Yangzi) River front line. In the meantime, Washington decided to close the JUSMAG and repatriate the American advisors. In fact, the Communists took the opportunity to gain time to reinforce their forces for the final offensive. By mobilising dozens of trains, they managed to mass over a million men and their equipment. The Nationalist delegates were presented with conditions only short of a total capitulation.

After a three-month respite, the Reds were finally ready to cross the Yangtze (Yangzi) on 19 April 1949. Crossing the wide river was no longer a major risk as most of the Nationalist Navy had been pulled back to Taiwan, together with the best Army units. The Communist armies established beachheads on the southern bank and did not hesitate to confront the British Royal Navy in artillery duels against the warships sent to Nanking in a demonstration of force to protect the British citizens. During the confrontation, the British suffered 47 killed and 74 wounded.

The frigate HMS *Amethyst* could not pull back towards Shanghai in time with the other ships and was caught on the river for three months, intermittently re-supplied by RAF Sunderland flying boats. She finally forced the blockade on 30 July 1949 and successfully joined the British fleet. However, the message was clear: The Communists were now willing to confront the Western powers. The time of gunboats freely sailing the Chinese rivers, was at the end.

Meanwhile, on 24 April, the Nationalist government evacuated Nanking (Nanjing) and moved its capital to Canton (Guangzhou). Shanghai was surrounded on 16 May. The city's outer defence lines rapidly collapsed despite the bombing raids carried out by the Taiwan-based B-24 and B-25 bombers. Ten days later, the metropolis fell to the Communists. Bad news kept on coming; on 20 May, Hsian (Xian) in Shensi (Shaanxi) Province fell. The Communists chased the Nationalist troops up to the west of the province, where they were stopped by a vigorous counter-attack carried out by 50,000 Muslim horse-mounted troops, under the orders of warlord Ma Pu Fang (Ma Bufang). After losing 15,000 men, the Communists retreated towards Hsian.

Despite the seriousness of the situation, Chennault decided to return to the USA in early May 1949, officially to promote his autobiography 'Way of a Fighter' where he gave his perspective on his years spent in China. It was also a propaganda book for a Nationalist China, a pledge to raise a second AVG. In fact, he threw all his force behind securing additional support for the Nationalists.

Assisted by Corcoran, a Washington lobbyist par excellence, Chennault mounted a full-scale publicity campaign, making

As the raising of new AVG was ruled out, it was envisaged that Chennault would be nominated as the Civil Aviation Advisor close to the Chinese government in 1948 in order to supervise all the air transportation tasks, civilian and military alike. These schemes were not implemented. A tired but determined Chennault seen here at his office in Shanghai. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

If Chennault be nominated as Civil Aviation Advisor at the end of 1948, it would also be that he would closely coordinate his work with the Chief of the Air Division of the JUSMAG for China, Major General Charles E. Thomas. The latter would also see his prerogatives expanded, including tactical supervision of the CNAF operations. A step further in the US involvement in the Chinese civil war that Washington finally renounced. (USAF)

speeches, giving interviews, writing articles, letters and importuning public officials. He asked for and was granted, another audition on 3 May, with the Senate's Armed Forces Committee and pleaded for increased military and economic help from the United States. He was convinced that a massive aid programme would allow the creation of a 'Free China' in the southwest of the country and in the northwestern provinces, all the way to the Chinese Turkestan. Although Chennault's dramatic plan impressed most listeners, several congressmen voiced concern about his motives. Was the plan simply a device for advancing his own economic purposes? Questioned about a possible conflict of interest should an assistance programme be implemented, Chennault replied: 'I am not advocating any aid here to the benefit of my airline. I have offered to give up all my interests in the airline, resign my position with it, if my recommendations for aid are carried out and if I can be used personally in the program'.

Chennault presented his plan to the high-ranking officials of the Department of State. On 11 May, he met with Undersecretary James E. Webb and submitted his programme to Dean Rusk, Deputy Secretary of State but neither of them was interested in his plan. Seeing no hope for the crumbling Nationalist regime, Secretary Dean Acheson and Walton Butterworth, director of the Division of Far East Affairs, expressed no enthusiasm for the project. Leighton Stuart and Minister Counsellor Lewis Clark also opposed it. They were convinced that American aid would not affect the course of the civil war and declared that 'the plan was impractical and of doubtful value to the furtherance of US national interest'.

On 30 June, a persistent Chennault testified before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, claiming that the Communists' victory in China would eventually contribute to Communist triumphs in Indochina and other Southeast Asian countries. He indicated that 'the Philippines and Japan would be endangered by a new Communist East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, from the Bering Sea to Bali'. In this situation, he argued, Truman should immediately send back military advisors to serve the Nationalists' military forces and increase military aid, particularly air aid. Chennault boasted that air support would play a significant role in determining the outcome of the civil war. He proposed to set up a new Sino-American air wing, jointly managed by both air forces. Logistic support would be provided by CAT and the other airlines. As usual, he suggested the creation of a new AVG, even though the idea had already been vetoed in December 1948 by the American Ambassador to China. However, Chennault had never stopped pushing his ideas and had found a listening ear with US Secretary of Defense, James Forrestal when he proposed Operation Demonstration. Unfortunately for Chennault, the overworked Forrestal had resigned from his position in March 1949 before committing suicide two months later.

Moreover, the Department of State opposed the idea of a new American volunteer unit. They feared it could trigger a Soviet tit for tat response, with the possible deployment of Russian 'volunteers' flying combat missions for the fledging Communist Air Force and the risk of seeing American and Soviet pilots duelling in the air. In addition to these concerns, intelligence reports indicated that Soviet instructors had already arrived with a mission to set up a Chinese Communist air force. In fact, since the resumption of the Chinese civil war in 1946, the Soviet Union had maintained an ambiguous attitude, not outrightly supporting one camp against another. Even if the Soviet troops had allowed Chinese Communist troops to enter Manchuria and even transfer some of the captured Japanese weapons to them, they departed in good order after signing an agreement with the Nationalists and handling over their occupied areas.

The Soviet controlled Hamiata airline company was allowed to continue after the Second World War to serve air routes linking China to the Soviet Union with a few Soviet-registered C-47s and Li-2s. But in July 1948, the Chinese decided that the ten-year Soviet Chinese agreement should come to an end on 9 September 1949. An extension for five years was agreed upon locally at Tihwa on 31 May 1949 but by that time, the Nationalist government had lost control over most of China.

18

NASCENT COMMUNIST AIR POWER

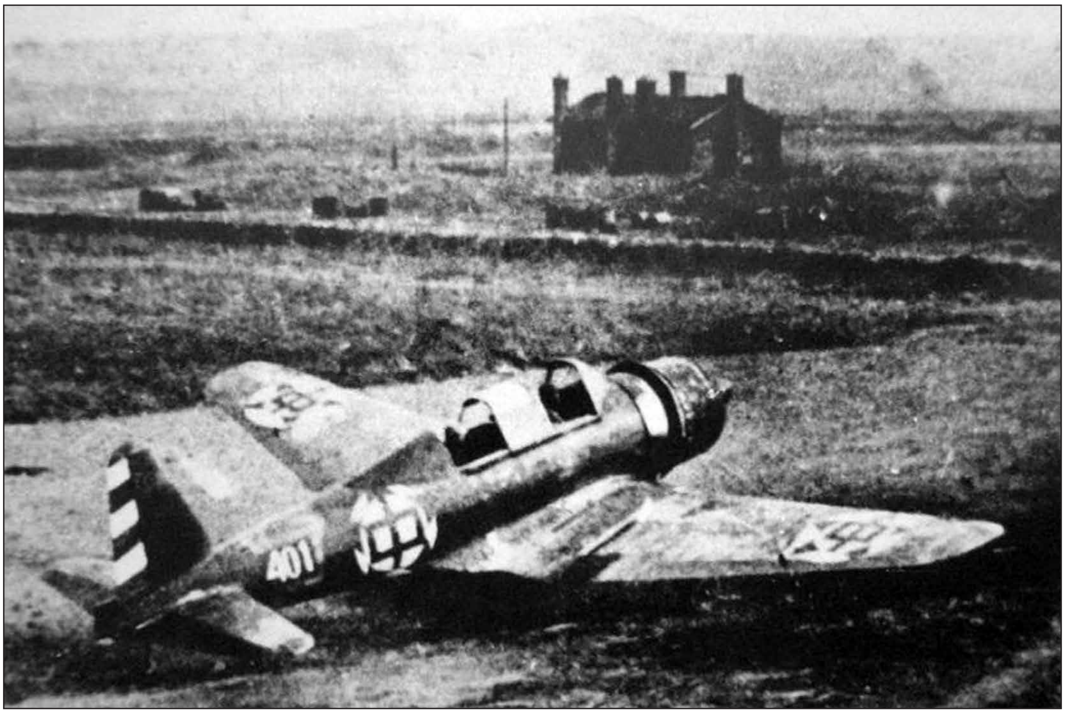
Stalin changed his mind once the Chinese Communists crossed the Yangtze (Yangzi) River and marched south. Until this point and contrary to the Nationalists claims, only a trickle of Soviet aid had been delivered to troops. Moscow decided to send in a military advisory mission to supervise the weapons deliveries, as well as helping the Chinese Communists to modernise their armed forces. The mission was settled in Peking in July 1949, under the command of Colonel General Andrei Yassilievitch Jdanov. His Chief of Staff and attached to the headquarters of the Chinese People's Army, was Major General Klinmukaiev. In addition to a political commissar, Nicolai Pokrishev, Colonel Tikhanov oversaw the group of advisors attached to the Red Chinese Army and Colonel Vorochilov attached to the nascent Chinese Communist Air Force.

The origins of what would become the People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) can be traced back to the first alliance between the KMT and the Communists under the tutelage of Doctor Sun Yat Sen, the father of the Chinese revolution. In September 1924, several Communist cadets attended the Canton flying school with their Nationalist comrades at the Whampao (Huangpu) military academy. The air school was staffed by Soviet instructors under Colonel Rogachev, using U-1 primary trainers, a copy of the British Avro 504 and R-2 light bombers, a copy of the British DH-9A.

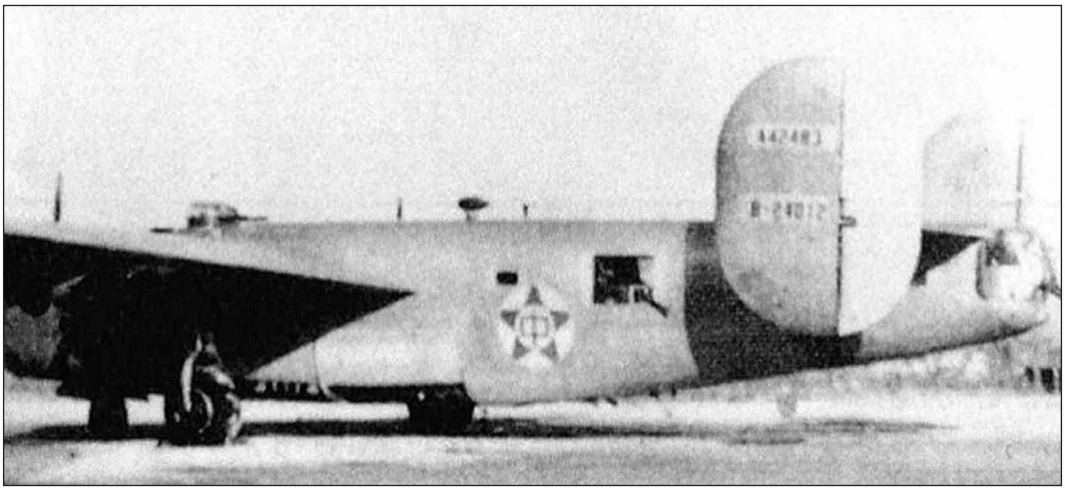
Thereafter, nine of them were sent to the Soviet Union for advanced training at the end of 1924. Two stayed in the Soviet Union – Chang Kiankun and Wang Bi – and served with the Soviet Air Force for 14 years. Both of them would play an instrumental role in the founding of a Chinese Communist air force. In September 1938, they were sent to Dihua (now Urumqi) in Sinkiang, as instructors, teaching CNAF pilots being trained on Soviet equipment. However, the six other Red pilots saw little use when the conflict broke out with the Nationalists in 1927. Symbolically, a Nationalist Vought V-65 Corsair light bomber captured by the Communists on 28 February 1930 and briefly used, wore the name of 'Lenin'. A Douglas O-2M was later captured on 20 April 1932, given the name of 'Marx' and was also used briefly.

The next attempt to create a Communist air unit occurred in 1938 when some 43 cadets were admitted into the air school of Kuldja (Yining), in the Soviet sponsored Sinkiang Province. Some 25 pilots and 18 mechanics graduated in 1942, being trained on Polikarpov U-2s and R-5s. Some even received advanced training on Polikarpov I-15 and I-16 fighters. The young group of cadres would form the backbone of the future PLAAF. However, when the local warlord Sheng Shi Tsai expelled the Soviet advisors and decided to merge his controlled territories with the central Chinese government in 1943, the Communist cadets were forced to flee. An American Intelligence report of July 1945, indicated that when the Soviets departed, there were some 19 Yakovlev UT-2 trainers, 17 I-15 and 18 I-16 fighters, as well as 17 SB bombers at Kuldja.

A row of Polikarpov I-16 fighters of the fighter squadron operated by the Soviet sponsored Sinkiang Province. Some Chinese Communist pilots were trained to operate them until a semi-autonomous entity rallied the Nationalist government. (Albert Grandolini Collection)



A Tachikawa Ki-55 advanced trainer at the Mundanjiang Air School in 1948. It sported the first type of Chinese Communist Air Force markings. (Albert Grandolini Collection)



One of the two B-24Js in service with the Communists in 1948. A third defected to Yenan in 1946 and was destroyed thereafter by a bombing raid of CNAF Liberators. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

A number of captured Japanese pilots were pressed into service with the nascent Communist air arm, like these two who served as instructors at the Mundanjiang Air School. Most came from the Japanese Army Air Force 26th Training Group, 2nd Air Army. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Meanwhile, still laying groundwork for the eventual establishment of an air force, the Communists established an Air Force Engineering School at Yenan, in March 1941, with Wang Bi as its director and Chang Kiankun as head instructor. This was followed by an Aviation Section within the Party's Central Military Commission in May 1944. Both were headed by Chang Chien Kun and Wang Bi. In July 1944, an American team arrived at Yenan to discuss possible deliveries of American aircraft and it was suggested that some of the supplies destined for Chiang Kai Shek, should go to the Red Army for use against the common enemy, Japan. These plans were never realised in the face of strong Nationalist opposition.

When the Communist troops entered Manchuria at the end of 1945, they scoured all the Japanese Air Force airbases in their occupied areas, in search for aircraft. The survey indicated 126 aircraft, including 12 fighters, 39 bombers, 18 reconnaissance planes and 57 training planes but most of them were damaged and of little value. There were also stocks of fuel and spare parts needing to be collected but widely dispersed and camouflaged.

Finally, in June 1946, the Communists set up the Northeast Aviation School at Tonghua, near Harbin, Kirin (Jilin) Province. In addition to the personnel previously trained in Sinkiang (Xinjiang), a group of Japanese prisoners, mostly from the 26th Training Group, 2nd Air Army and under the command of Major Hayashi Yuichiro, also served as instructors. The political commissars ordered the cadets to obey their Japanese instructors and 'to distinguish between Japanese militarists and the average Japanese soldiers forced to fulfil their military services'. Another problem was the low educational level of the cadets, selected along political lines and 'correct social backgrounds' rather than according to their academic credentials. Consequently, the instructors had to adapt their courses by emphasising practical rather than theory training.

Another problem was the lack of primary and basic trainers. No more than 10 Nikkoku Ki-86 primary trainers were found but most of them were damaged and only three could be made serviceable. They were quickly lost in training accidents. As a result, the cadets were initiated into flight training directly on the Tachikawa Ki-55 advanced trainers, with 30 available, alongside three Mitsubishi Ki-30 light bombers. Three Tachikawa Ki-54s were used for multi-engine training. A half dozen Nakajima Ki-43-II fighters, formerly belonging to the Japanese Army Air Force 4th Training Regiment, were also repaired and served as advanced trainers and combat aircraft.

The sole recorded combat action at the early stage of the conflict took place in May 1946 when three Ki-43s, flown by Japanese pilots, strafed a Nationalist train loaded with troops, north of Mukden. However, due to CNAF harassments, the school was moved to the eastern shore of the Xingkai Lake in November 1946. On 15 October 1947, a flight of CNAF P-51Ds took off from Mukden for a patrol between the Soviet border and Harbin but crossed the path of a Communist Ki-55 flown by cadet Lu Liping and an unnamed Japanese instructor. Attacked, the plane was set on fire by Captain Xu Jizhen. Witnessing the scene, Communist pilot Fang Hua scrambled a Nakajima Ki-43-II fighter for the first but unconclusive, dogfight with the CNAF.

The school moved yet again and finally settled in Mudanjiang in November 1948. By July 1949, the school had trained 126 pilots, 322 mechanics, 24 navigators and 88 other technical personnel. Advanced training was now taking place in the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, on 17 March 1949, an Aviation Bureau was formed with Chang Chien Kun as Director.

The first Soviet type delivered in 1949 was a batch of Yak-12s, used for training and liaison missions. One of these is seen here with an instructor and cadets planning a flight. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

The advancing Communist armies captured large numbers of airbases, as well as CNAF aircraft which came in addition to a steady arrival of Nationalist defecting pilots. By June 1949, some 20 Nationalist aircraft, including three P-51s, one P-47, three B-24s, six C-46s, four C-47s and others, carrying 54 pilots and other aviation personnel, had defected. Most of them had been collected and regrouped at Chianmussu in Manchuria. An American Intelligence report dated 1 April 1949, listed 43 aircraft based there: three B-24s, three B-25s, nine Mosquitos, one P-47, eight P-51s, one AT-11, two C-47s, nine C-46s, one AT-6, one PT-17, two PT-19s, one L-5 and a pair of unidentified trainers. Altogether, this allowed a reorganisation of the Communist air units in August 1949. A preliminary agreement was signed on 18 August with the Soviets and Major General D. Prutkov was appointed Air Chief Advisor to China, replacing Colonel Vorochilov. Moscow also agreed to deliver some 435 aircraft.

A survey indicated that the nascent PLAAF had some 117 captured aircraft on strength, 1,278 engines, 74,000 bombs, 2,267 personnel and had repaired some 40 airfields. The Soviet advisors decided to reorganise the training system by creating six new schools, specialising in technical and flight training, staffed with captured Nationalists, including 1,400 CNAF personnel at Shanghai and Soviet instructors. The 1st Air School was at Harbin, the 2nd Air School at Changchun, the 3rd Air School at Jinzhou, the 4th Air School at Mukden, the 5th Air School at Jinan and the 6th Air School at Peking. Mudanjiang became the 7th Air School.

Upon entering Mukden, the Communists occupied the local, extensive aircraft maintenance facilities, as well as taking their personnel prisoners and forcing them to work for the Reds. They founded the Aircraft Repair Factory Number 5. Its main task was to restore a maximum number possible of captured aircraft back into service, including some 34 P-51Ds captured at Jinzhou. This was helped when the Communists captured the Nanyuang AB, Peiping, where they found three additional Mustangs but more importantly, some 128 Packard-built V-1650 Merlin engines which thus provided plenty replacement engines for the maintenance of the P-51Ds.

Another main training base was established at Nanking after the Nationalists evacuated their capital towards Canton in April 1949. A CIA report in September, indicated it was headed by Liu Shan Pa and a Soviet advisory mission of 12 instructors had just settled there, commanded by Major General Zontev. The school was later merged with the schools in Manchuria under the umbrella of the newly created Air Academy, with as overall commander, Chang Chien Kun. It then had 107 planes, including captured North American AT-6s, Fairchild PT-19s, Stinson L-5s and 17 Yak-12s, the first Soviet-built aircraft to be taken on charge. The CIA also indicated that approximately 80 Chinese pilots trained in the Soviet Union, came back in July and August 1949.

More worrying, the Communists were hastening to create the Air Combat Group for covering the offensive across the Yangtze River but were not ready in time. Nevertheless, by summer 1949, the unit deployed the 1st Squadron equipped with Japanese aircraft (four Ki-43-IIs, three Ki-45s, two Ki-46s), the 2nd Squadron (12 P-51Ds), the 3rd Squadron (two B-24s, six B-25s, five Mosquitos) and the 4th Squadron (C-46s, C-47s, Ki-54s). A 5th Squadron was activated at the end of 1949 on La-9s, the first Soviet fighters delivered to the Chinese Communists. This was to become a new threat for the Tigers.

To alleviate the persistent lack of fully qualified pilots, the CIA indicated that Japanese pilots were also serving in the operational squadrons. It was estimated that around 100 Japanese pilots still served with the Communists. The survivors were finally allowed to return to Japan only in 1956. The 2nd Squadron officially took air defence alert duty, on 15 August1949, to protect Peking (Beijing) where Mao Tse Tung (Mao Zedong) proclaimed the People's Republic of China on 1 October.

Was there a possibility of the Soviet Union establishing a 'volunteer air group' to intervene in the Chinese civil war, if the United States did the same by creating a new AVG? Even if the context were different, Chennault would know, being the witness of massive Soviet air power deployment in China between 1937 and 1941. To rule out that possibility was a risk that Washington did not want to take. Exactly a year later, Stalin decided to intervene in the Korean War by setting up the 64th Air Corps, consisting in several air divisions of MiG-15 jet fighters manned by 'Soviet volunteers' flying aircraft painted in North Korean markings.

Facing these developments, the new State Secretary, Dean Acheson rejected Chennault's proposal for a new AVG and testified before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs in June, claiming, 'I am not in a position to come to Congress and ask Congress for money at this time to do something which we do not believe can possibly be effective'. He was fully backed by Truman and Marshall, at that time fully committed to their 'Europe first' strategy. Their economic recovery plan for western Europe was at the centre piece of the United States foreign policy, not only for reconstructing and stabilising the devastated European countries

A grand review took place in November 1949 at the Peking Nanyuang AB with the official creation of the PLAAF. Most of the operational aircraft were gathered there, including some P-47 and P-51 fighters, B-25 and Mosquito light bombers, C-46 transport and different types of trainers. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

but also vital for a smooth transition from war towards peace for the American economy.

The massive demobilisation of the US armed forces at the end of the Second World War left few leverage tools available to Washington. The strength of the ground and air forces of the US Army stood at 8,290,000 at the end of the war. By February 1948, it had shrunk to 552,000. In comparison, the Soviet ground and air forces had begun demobilisation from a strength of approximately 9,880,000. They ended their demobilisation in 1948 with slightly fewer than 2,500,000. Worse, half of the American units served occupation duty in Europe and Japan, with few of them at full strength and ready for combat. In fact, the US Army's effective combat strength was barely 2 1/3 divisions when the Berlin crisis happened.

In fact, the whole United States strategy lay on the newly independent USAF and its Strategic Air Command. The nation's security rested on the decisive employment of nuclear weapons. However, at that time, few nuclear bombs were available, as well as the necessary bombers to deliver them. While Chennault was pleading to resurrect a joint Sino-American air wing, most of the USAF transport assets had already been mobilised for sustaining the blockaded city of Berlin. Three out of its six Bombardment Groups, equipped with B-29 bombers, were also redeployed in Europe. Later, Marshall recalled:

> We are playing with fire with the Russians while we have nothing with which to put it out … I was getting the same appeal in relation to the Far East and China. At those times, my facilities for giving them hell – and I am a soldier and know something about the ability to give hell – was one and a third division over the entire United States. That is quite a proposition when you deal with somebody with over 260 divisions.

In August 1949, when the Soviet Union detonated its first nuclear bomb, putting an end to the American monopoly on this field, the US administration published a 'China White Paper' detailing the American policy in China. The document, fully endorsed by President Truman, stated that the outcome of the Civil War should be determined by Chinese forces only. The United States were not going to become more involved in China, at least not officially.

19

FIRST CONTACTS WITH THE AGENCY

One of the main reasons that brought Chennault to the United States was to finalise discussions with the CIA. The agency succeeded in 1947, the Central Intelligence Group and the War Department's Strategic Service Unit, both created after the disbanding of the wartime OSS in October 1945. With the Berlin airlift underway, on the advice of George Kennan, the head of the State Department

Three of the CAT Cessna 195s used for operations in northwest China in 1949. The airline acquired six of them that proved robust and reliable, operating from short and unprepared airfields. (Felix Smith)

planning staff, it was decided to create a permanent covert action group to implement his 'containment of the Soviet Union' strategy. President Truman approved the creation of the Office of Policy Coordination (OPC) on 1 September 1948. Its purpose was to carry out guerrilla operations against the Soviet Union and its Eastern European satellites by supporting local insurgents and by infiltrating armed groups. Equipped with radios, they would also serve as an early warning net to warn of an invasion of western Europe. On paper, the OPC was part of the CIA but the reality was more complex. Its director, Frank Wisner, was appointed by the Secretary of State and took orders from the State Department and the Department of Defense. The OPC also operated separately from the CIA's Office of Special Operation, which had responsibility for setting up spy networks.

On 6 July1947, Chennault and Corcoran had a meeting with Admiral Roscoe H. Hillenkoetter, the new director of the CIA. It is likely that Chennault was in a close relationship with the Agency as he regularly provided information about the political and military situation in China. Hillenkoetter arranged for Corcoran to meet Frank Wisner to discuss the possibility of using the CAT aircraft for the OPC covert operations in China and Asia. Regardless of Chennault's political convictions, it was also clear to CAT's management that the evolution of the situation in China made it impossible to operate a 'normal' airline at a profit. The talks lasted several months before a proper operational frame was defined. On 9 May1949, Chennault finalised the contract with the CIA representatives, specifying that CAT could be put at the disposal of the Agency for its operations in Asia. This was the first step for the CAT and the CIA entering into what would prove a lengthy and intimate relationship.

The CIA mainly targeted Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union for clandestine air operations, dropping agents and weapons on unmarked transport aircraft. For plausible deniability, the Agency used a group of expatriate pilots: Czech, Hungarians and Polish. However, like Chennault, the CIA had also great hopes that an anti-Communist zone in the western Muslim provinces of China, could hold out longer. Thanks to contracts placed for light plane services in early 1949, CAT was already present in the area and had developed a forward operating base at Lanchow (Lanzhou), a walled city located on the banks of the Yellow River in the Kansu (Gansu) Province. From this base, CAT's light aircraft started providing passenger and freight services throughout the neighbouring Ning Hsia (Ningxia) and Chinghai (Qinghai) Provinces.

To supplement its Piper L-4 and Stinson L-5 fleet, the airline had purchased six Cessna 195s, a type perfectly suited to operate from the rough airstrips found in the regions. After delivery by ship to Hong Kong, the Cessna 195s had been re-assembled and four were ferry-flown in early May to Lanchow (Lanzhou), guided by a CAT C-46. These light airplanes were tasked with operating short leg flights, carrying valuable cargo such as wool from Sinning (Xining).

The airline's main 'client' was the Chinese Muslim (Hui) warlord Ma Pu Fang (Ma Bufang). He was the prominent leader of the Ma Clique which grouped some five Muslin warlords, who had regrouped its 100,000 soldiers on the Sinning (Xining) Tibetan highlands after inflicting a severe blow to the Communists. In addition to facing advancing Communist troops, he also faced a coalition of local Turkic tribes that raised up against Chinese rule in November 1944. The rebels were supported by the Soviets who had been enraged to be ousted from Sinkiang the previous year. With Soviet arms deliveries and Soviet advisors attached, the rebels proclaimed the creation of the Second East Turkistan Republic, or Uighuristan, at the city of Ghuljan, northwest of Urumqi on the Soviet border.

The new entity setup a regular armed force of 50,000 men, including an air force made up of 42 CNAF captured aircraft, mostly made up of the former aircraft delivered by the Soviets to former warlord Sheng Shicai, including Polikarpov I-15 and I-16 fighters and SB bombers. Of this total, a dozen were made airborne again and flown by Turkic origin pilots. They supported the advances of the rebels, reinforced by Soviet advisors, who now controlled two-thirds of the Sinkiang Province by summer 1945. The rebels' aircraft operated from the Khuldja and Paoyantai airfields, whilst the CNAF operated from the Hami, Urumqi and Shikbo airfields. This last airfield was subsequently attacked eight times by the rebels' aircraft, putting it out of action.

When regular units of the Mongolian People's Army also crossed the border in support of the rebels and threatening Kuchentze (Kitai), the CNAF attacked them from the Tiayu airfield. The Chinese outposts along the Pamir Mountains on the western part of the province had also been wiped out, the survivors crossing into British India to seek refuge. However, in May 1946, under intense Soviet pressure, the Uighur leaders were forced to back down and signed a peace agreement with China that recognised a status of

Pilot Felix Smith shakes hands with Muslim General Ma Pu Fang, the officer in charge of the Chinese northwest provinces, when he was handing over the first sack of mail at Lanchow on 9 May 1949. Ma Pu Fang would be later evacuated by a CAT aircraft, before seeking refuge in Saudi Arabia. (Felix Smith)

autonomy for their controlled area. Their armed forces, reduced to 12,000 troops, were officially put under the command of the Chinese Nationalist armed forces. Nevertheless, the Chinese continued to be opposed by some armed groups who refused to hand over their weapons.

Chiang Kai Shek nominated Ma Pu Fang as the commander of all the remaining Nationalist forces in northwest China and promised him air drops of weapons and ammunitions. As the CNAF transports were not available, it was the CAT C-46s that flew these missions but only a trickle of supplies was delivered. Sterling Bernis inaugurated the route to Ninghsia on 15 May whilst CAT contracted with the Chinese Army for 30 flights a month from Amoy to Lanchow, Chungking and Hengyang, for Operation Payroll, carrying silver dollars. Willauer, however, reported to Chennault: 'For the first time in CAT's history, as far as I know, we have had to pay squeeze to get a contract. It probably was the only way the contract could have been gotten, but I still do not like it'. Light plane operations continued to expand, with routes opened towards Pingliang, Wuwei, Siaho, Shantan, Tienshui, Din Yuanning and Shansah. On 19 June 1949, CAT lost one Cessna 195 after it entered a sandstorm while approaching Lanchow (Lanzhou). Pilot Eddie Norwich, who had been a navigator in the USMC, was killed in the crash with his two Chinese passengers.

Meanwhile, the Chinese Communists negotiated the status of some the northern remote provinces with the Soviet Union. Mao Tse Tung claimed a reunified Mongolia, by uniting Outer Mongolia, an independent country under Soviet tutelage and Inner Mongolia under Nationalist control, as a province of the future People's Republic of China. Stalin opposed the scheme and instead urged Mao to occupy Sinkiang in order to secure its borders with British India and Afghanistan. Stalin feared that the British could intervene and move from Kashmir into western Sinkiang to support a local Uighur area centred on Hotan and Kashgar.

Using requisitioned trains, the Communists moved in two armies as reinforcements and started their advance into Chinese Turkestan again. They were closing in after having taken Lanchow (Lanzhou) but the promised CNAF support did not come. According to President Li Tsung Jen, Chiang Kai Shek had issued secret orders not to assist Ma Pu Fang and was glad to see one of his old warlord opponents' armies destroyed. On their side, the Communists benefitted from Soviet support who provided some 40 Li-2 and Il-12 transport aircraft to ferry troops to key locations of Sinkiang. It was the first time that the Soviets intervened directly in the Chinese Civil War.

Ma adopted a strategy of delaying fights but it became rapidly clear that he had to disperse his troops and start a guerrilla campaign behind Communist lines. As the situation deteriorated, the light aircraft saw much use as a means of evacuation for local officials and politicians. One of the evacuees was the young Panchen Lama, the second-highest ranking religious and political leader of Tibet who opposed the Dalai Lama and lived in exile in Tsinghai Province with its Red Hats Sect followers. He was accompanied by two suspicious Chinese Nationalist advisors.

On 28 August, CAT evacuated Ma Pu Fang from Sining and $1.5 million in gold bars. He stopped in Canton, called on President Li and asked his forgiveness, then continued on to Mecca. A short time later, it was the turn of the Ninghsia Province governor, Ma Hung Kuei and his treasury. He did not stop at Canton but went directly to southern California to raise horses. His cousin surrendered the province to the Communists and became vice-governor under the new regime. Advancing along the Wei River, the Communists then occupied the Kansu (Gansu) Province, opening the gate to the Chinese Turkestan in September 1949. The Communists took Urumqi, the capital of Sinkiang Province, on 7 December when the local Nationalist garrison switched sides, destroying the hope for a Muslim stronghold.

It must be noted that by mid-1949 CAT still carried out missions not related to the ongoing civil war, such as VIP transport for the Nationalist government and DDT-spraying over the city of Canton (Guangzhou).

20

THE CIA ACQUIRE AN AIRLINE

The CAT continued to struggle to keep its business in early 1949. After reaching an all-time peak in March of 4,508 flying hours and 5,194,825 ton-miles, flying declined in April to 3,845 hours and 3,198,745 ton-miles – the bottom fell out in May. Meanwhile, with the quickly deteriorating situation, the United States decided to withdraw the Marines at Tsingtao and Shanghai, closing their last bases in China. In order to extricate them, some 1,250 men from Guam were redeployed to Tsingtao in November 1948 to temporarily reinforce the garrison of 3,000 Marines, whilst elements of the 9th Marine Regiment were also deployed to Shanghai to insure security for the pulling out operations. A detachment of Marines was sent to protect the US Embassy in Nanking.

On 21 January 1949, the Corsair equipped VMA-211, the last USMC squadron based in China, departed Tsangkou AB (Tsingtao) and landed on the carrier USS *Rendova*. The unit continued to operate from the ship for several more days, covering the withdrawal of the evacuation by ship, of the heavy equipment. The last to depart the Tsangkou AB were the R5D Skymasters of the VMR-153 on 29 January. The departing US Marines had handed over their base to the CNAF.

The JUSMAG China was also closed down on 3 March 1949. Its departure signified that Washington had decided to curtail its official policy to support Nationalist China. When its last commander, Major General David G. Barr, declared that the United States would deploy troops and particularly, air units and take part directly in the fighting, the situation now seemed irreversible.

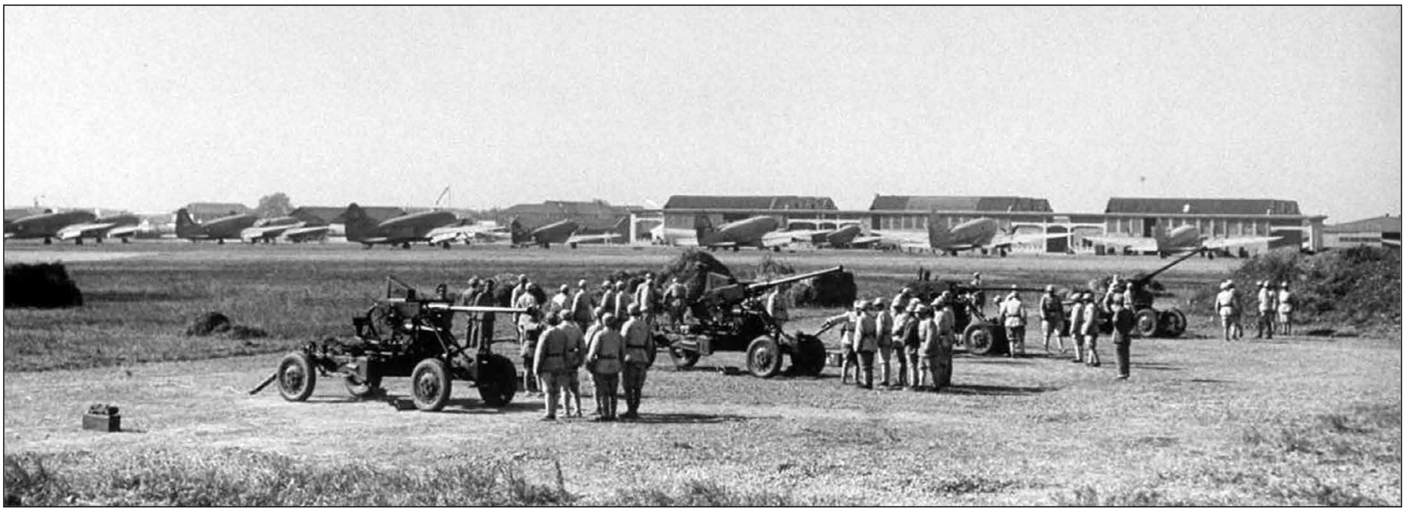
With the last US Marines departing, the Communists closed in on Tsingtao and took over the town and its harbour on 26 May. The CAT's C-46s flew out the last refugees and a handful of barmaids of White Russian origin. In his autobiography, CAT pilot Felix Smith mentioned, tongue-in-cheek, that the common evacuation pattern of a Chinese city was: Chinese officials first, followed by CATC and CNAC, followed by the Russian barmaids and finally CAT, the last to leave. The very last USMC detachments at Shanghai were also evacuated under the protection of the cruisers USS *Manchester* and USS *St. Paul* on 26 May. On 2 June, the Communists entered the metropolis and the CAT main operating base.

In August, after having been delayed by a major flood of the Yangtze (Yangzi) River, the Communists restarted their offensive. Around 1.5 million men moved towards southern China and along the river. Meanwhile, to consolidate the Nationalist forces, a Supreme Council was created at Canton with Chiang Kai Shek as chairman, Li Tsung Jen as deputy, and Yen Hsi Shan as premier. The vital commercial centre of Changsha in the Hunan Province surrendered after its 55,000-strong garrison defected to the Reds on 5 August. The port of Foochow (Fuzhou) was captured on 17 August. However, the troops commanded by Lin Piao (Lin Biao) were stopped before Hengyang by a counter-attack executed by General Pai Chung Hsi (Bai Chongxi), one of the most competent Nationalist generals. Rallying their troops, the Nationalists had transferred 150,000 troops from Hainan Island to the mainland and an additional 50,000 troops from Taiwan landed at Amoy (Xiamen). Their mission was to establish and hold a beachhead to facilitate the evacuation operations. Most of these troop movements were made by boats but CAT airplanes were also involved in flying some units closer to the front lines.

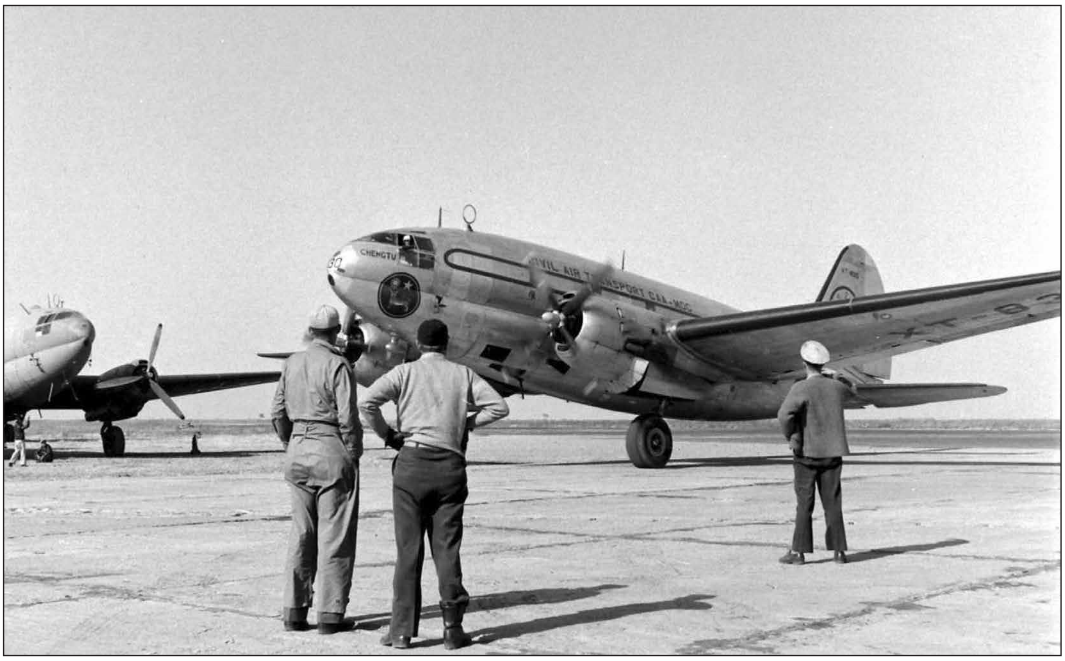
The Nationalist victory at Hengyang brought some respite but it did not last long. By the end of September 1949, the Communist columns were moving towards the remaining southern cities. The CAT, also with the CNAC and CATC, were fully mobilised by the Nationalist Combined Services Command to ferry ammunitions from main depots in Chungking to the front lines. Despite fierce resistance, Swatow (Shantou) and Amoy (Xiamen) were lost. On 11 October, the Communist vanguards were only 60km north of Canton (Guangzhou). The Nationalists decided to abandon the city and move their capital to Chungking (Chongqing), which had previously been the provisional seat of the Chinese government from late 1937 to mid-1946.

Preparing for the evacuation of Tsingtao, CAT pilots Eddie Sims and Var Green scribbled on the fuselage of their C-46, the last plane to leave the city, the day's schedule. They were finally forced to leave when Communist mortar shells began exploding on the perimeter of the airport. (Felix Smith)

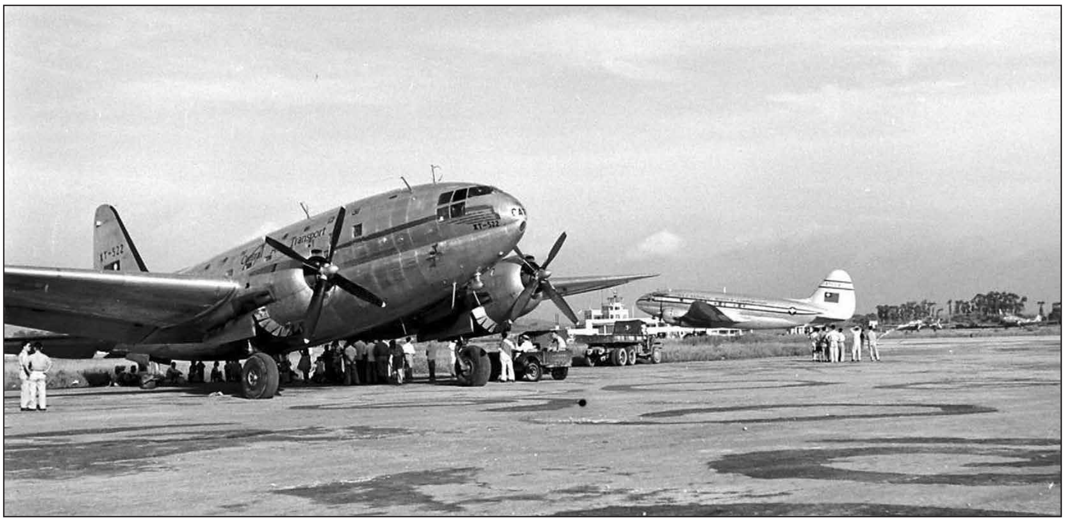
The Communist continued their offensive throughout the spring of 1949 against Shanghai and Nanking. CAT continued to operate from the former airport, its main operational hub, until the fall of the city on 27 May. At that time, most of the CAT aircraft sported names of Chinese cities, like Lanchow on this C-46 in the foreground. (Albert Grandolini Collection)



A direct attack by the nascent Communist Air Force became a real threat that could disrupt Nationalist air operations. Air defence units were deployed to protect the main airports, like this battery of Bofors L60 40mm anti-aircraft guns at Shanghai. (Albert Grandolini Collection)



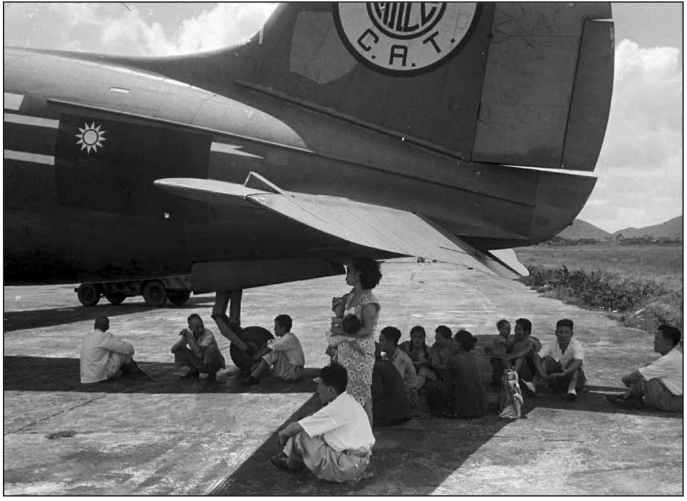
Chengtu, a CAT C-46 seen returning from an evacuation mission from Nanking. The capital of China fell into Communist hands on 2 June 1949. The Nationalists then transferred the seat of the government to Canton. (Albert Grandolini Collection)



By early October 1949, the Nationalists began to evacuate Canton. These passengers are awaiting a flight towards Taiwan or for some southern cities still in the hands of the Chinese forces. In foreground is a CATC C-46, while another C-46 of the CNAC is seen taking off in the background. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

The evacuation from Canton took place in a chaotic end-of-reign atmosphere. The Nationalist troops were blowing up their ammunition and equipment depots, the factories and almost all the important bridges of the city. The airport facilities had already been seriously damaged and there was a climate of panic. Chinese workers and soldiers had taken hostage two CAT staff members: Deputy Personnel Manager Reese T. Bradburn and Air Traffic Manager Arthur Fung. After a ransom was demanded, Willauer and Rousselot were tasked with its delivery. After landing, the plane stopped at the end of the runway to drop the money, before taxiing to the apron to collect the hostages. To their surprise, they were met by other employees who had already managed to buy back the hostages and even purchased some guns from the guards. Everybody embarked and the heavily loaded C-47 took off for Hong Kong with 80 passengers.

The Communists entered Canton on 15 October and Amoy two days later. By this time, the Reds had penetrated the southwest and on 13 November, the Nationalists abandoned Kweiyang (Guiyang), about 320km south of Chunking. Consequently, the Nationalists designated Chengtu (Chengdu) as the seat of the much-reduced national government. Chungking fell on 30 November and on 8 December, the national capital was moved to Taipei (Taiwan). By 10 December, Chiang Kai Shek left the mainland for Taiwan with the government's gold reserves. Most of the institutions, the majority of the CNAF, as well as the Chinese Navy, also evacuated to Taiwan.

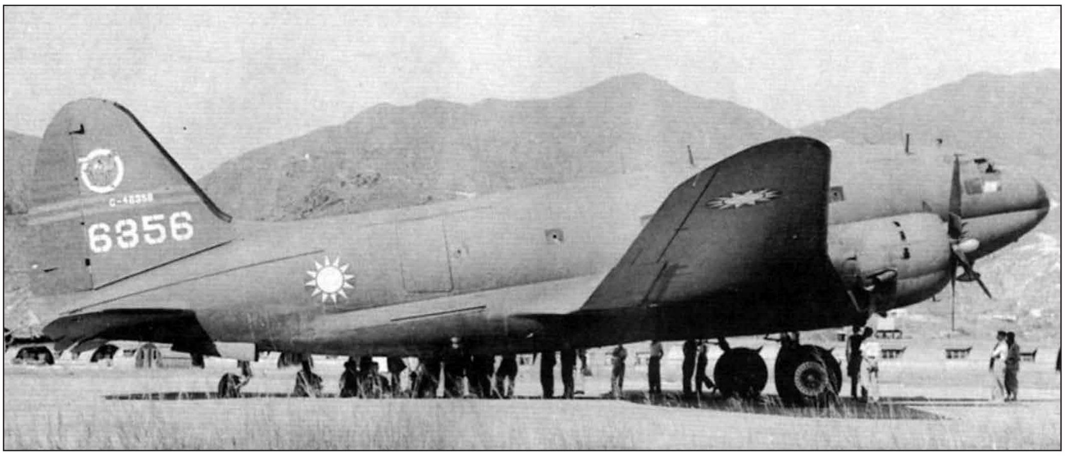


Passengers patiently waiting in the shade of a CAT C-46 at Canton before boarding it for a flight towards Taiwan on 10 October 1949. Five days later, the Communists captured the city with scenes of panic, particularly at the airport where thousands of people tried to escape. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

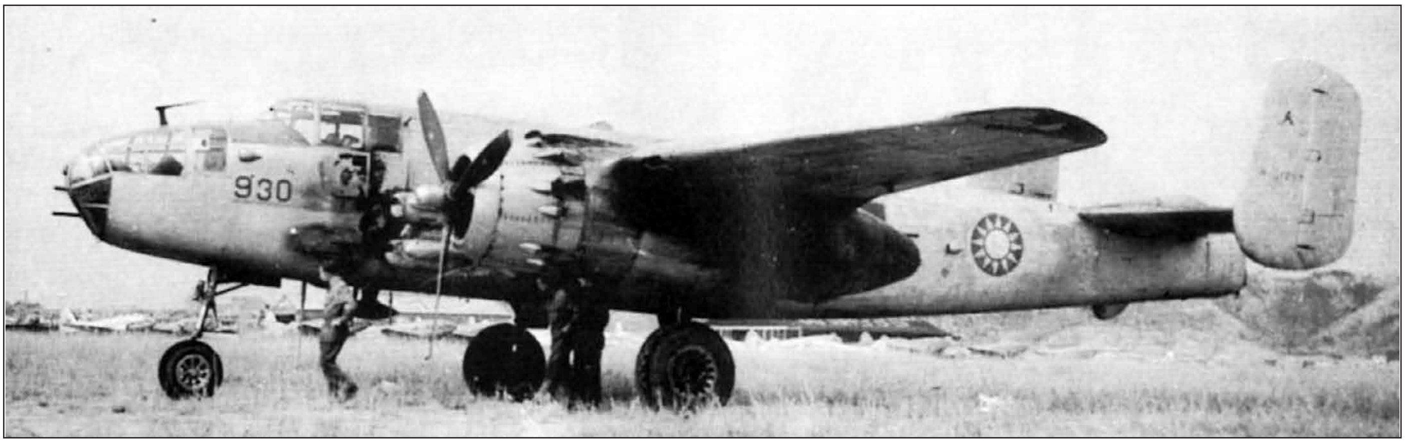
As the situation deteriorated, in Washington on 24 August 1949, Chennault met with Colonel Richard G. Stilwell, head of OPC's Far East Division. From the lengthy discussion, it appeared that the CIA was more than ever willing to be involved in CAT operations. Paradoxically, the situation in Washington seemed to improve as the situation in China got worse. On the surface, the policy of non-interference remained fixed but American policy makers were coming to see China as part of the worldwide Communist problem. Chennault was not the only one to point out the Soviet presence in China and to advance a domino theory of events.

The National Security Directive (NSD) 48/1, drawn up in June 1949, took a similar view. Termed by some being the 'key document' in framing the domino theory, it labelled the Soviet Union the principal threat to peace and stability in Asia. The United States, it argued, had to formulate a policy to 'contain' Soviet power and influence in the Far East. Dean Rusk, Deputy Undersecretary of State, wrote to Secretary Acheson on 16 July calling for a covert 'action program' that would include aid to non-Communist groups in China. George Kennan, who shaped the Communist 'containment' policy in Europe, and John P. Davies, China expert on the Policy Planning Staff, showed similar concerns. Davies even contemplated the 'selective use of air power' against the Chinese Communists 'to compel them to respect the United States and moderate their behaviour'. Most importantly, President Truman now was coming to see China as part of the 'Communist problem'.

Chennault and Willauer suggested an operational plan covering Japan, China and Indochina which was met with some favour. To circumvent the legal obstacles to finance the project, some $75 million from a fund for a Europe-oriented programme, was redirected by invoking the Presidential right to use discretionary budgets (Section 303) to sustain special operations and security programmes in Asia, like the wartime financing of OSS. The president had to specify the facts of the nature of the expenditures. CIA Director Hillenkoetter called at the State



This CNAF C-46, packed with refugees, landed at Hong Kong Kai Tak airport in October 1949 to the great consternation of British authorities. Its stay was short and it flew out towards Hainan Island after refuelling. (Albert Grandolini Collection)



Chinese military aircraft was strictly forbidden to land at Hong Kong but many landed there anyway in the last weeks of 1949, fleeing the advance of the Communist forces. This CNAF B-25 of the 1st Medium Bomber Group, with 13 aboard (including women and children) put down on 12 December 1949 out of fuel. The extensive blast scorching around the side guns indicated that the crew had to strafe some targets on the way. Despite its apparent dilapidated appearance, the engines appear to be brand new and recently installed, still showing signs of storage inhibitor. It took off some days later for Taiwan. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

46393
AIR ATTACHE US EMBASSY CHINA
UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

Among the aircraft evacuated from China at the end of 1949 was this B-17 used by the Air Attaché of the US Embassy. It was used regularly, alongside several C-47s, for the transportation of the JUSMAG personnel and the embassy staff. It was also regularly used by Major General Charles E. Thomas, the Air Division commander of the US advisory mission, to overfly and survey the main battlefields. Seen here with its starboard wheel stuck in soft ground at Kai Tak – Hong Kong airport on 29 June 1949. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Department on 1 September 1949 and talked to Secretary Acheson, Kennan and Ambassador Philip C. Jessup about OPC's plan to subsidise CAT.

Three weeks later, the State Department gave informal approval to the scheme at a meeting between Hillenkoetter, Undersecretary James E. Webb and Assistant Secretary Butterworth. The latter explained that the State Department would not object to minimal covert financial support to the airline if it would facilitate CIA secret operations. On 4 October 1949, George Kennan, the State Department's representative on the OPC oversight committee, finally approved the covert scheme.

Meanwhile a formal agreement came on 1 November, Corcoran signing for CAT and Emmett D. Echols of the CIA's Office of Finance representing the United States Government. The agreement committed the Agency to provide up to $500,000 to finance a CAT airbase and $200,000 to fly CIA personnel and equipment in and out of China. It must also underwrite any shortfall that might result from any hazardous mission. This injection of fresh money came just in time to pay the salaries and purchase new equipment, including 3 DC-4 airplanes.

On 10 October 1949, the same day Mao Tse Tung proclaimed the People's Republic of China in Peking, CAT began to fly for the OPC moving around the CIA agents coordinating the weapons airdrops in southwest China. The OPC team was placed under the command of Alfred T. Cox, a former OSS officer. During the Second World War, he was parachuted into southern France to organise local French resistance groups and carried out attacks and sabotages behind the German lines. He was transferred to China in early 1945 to train Chinese airborne commando units to be inserted behind Japanese lines for the same kind of operations.

Cox immediately had contact with General Pai Chung Hsi, on 14 October 1949 in Kweilin (Guilin), at the head of the last effective Nationalist force. He discussed with General Pai his plan to defend the Kwangsi (Guanxi) Province on a line running southwest from Kweilin to Nanning, then bending southeast in Kwantung Province to the Liuchow peninsula and nearby Hainan Island. To implement his plan, Pai had 200,000 troops, was short of ammunition and heavy weapons, was without replacements and had no reserve supplies. Pai estimated that he could fight one, perhaps two, major battles before losing combat effectiveness. He requested urgent deliveries of weapons, specifically 10,000 machine guns and 5,000 60mm mortars.

Cox flew to Taipei to discuss with Chinese leaders but only a few stocks of weapons were available. Nevertheless, Cox arranged for the CAT C-46s to deliver a few supplies to Pai. Cox shared the pessimism of the Chinese general and stated that 'our air bases are falling one after the other, and pretty soon we'll have to buy an aircraft carrier to have a place to land. Time is running out'. As Cox shuttled among the few remaining Nationalist pockets on the mainland using a CAT C-47, two fast-moving Communist columns converged on Pai's Army.

In November, President Li Tsung Jen went to Nanning to review the situation with Pai who was forced to abandon Kweilin on 22 November. He moved his remaining units towards the Liuchow peninsula, hoping to ferry them over to Hainan Island. CAT established a base at Sanya on Hainan and began to transfer personnel and equipment from Kunming. After the Communists took Nanning in far southern China on 6 December, the remaining units, under General Pai, disintegrated and fled to Hainan and French Indochina.

With the fall of Canton, CAT was losing its only remaining large hub in mainland China. The company's headquarters were moved to the British enclave of Hong Kong, whilst most of its planes were transferred to Taiwan. Inside the British colony, a new crisis erupted after the directors of the other two civilian airlines, Colonel C. Y. Liu managing director of the CNAC and Colonel C. L. Chen, general manager of the CATC, decided to join the Communists. They left Hong Kong on 9 November and took 12 transport planes (8 C-47s, 3 C-46s and a Convair 240), fully loaded with about $3 million of spare parts, with them to Tientsin. The move appeared to have been planned as all the American pilots flying for both airlines had been removed from the flight schedules at the time of the defection.

The remaining Chinese employees of the two companies were largely sympathetic to the Communists and took physical possession of the remaining aircraft. They announced that the aircraft belonged to the new regime and warned that 'this sacred property should be respected by the Hong Kong authorities'. The Nationalist consul immediately manoeuvered to have the Chinese registrations of the remaining CNAC and CATC airplanes put on hold, forcing the British authorities to ground them. In parallel, Chennault intervened with Chiang Kai Shek to have the grounded fleet, consisting of 18 C-46s, 21 C-47s and six Convair 240s from CATC with at least 31 C-46s, 15 C-47s, one PBY, and five DC-4s from CNAC, transferred to Taiwan to ensure they could not fall into

The United Kingdom's Defence of Hong Kong

By autumn 1949, when the Communists armies had crossed the Yangtze River and taken Nanking and Shanghai, it appeared that was only a matter of time before they would take Canton, and by following the Pearl River, would head towards Hong Kong. London anxiously awaited their arrival at the gates of their administrated territory. The British government was still debating how to keep control of the strategic harbour. Meanwhile, as early as May, it was decided to reinforce the defences of Hong Kong by sending in additional troops to reinforce the local 40th Division, made up of the 26th Gurkha, the 27th and 28th Infantry Brigades, the 23rd Field Artillery Regiment and the 3rd Royal Tank Regiment equipped with Churchill and Comet tanks. By November, there were around 40,000 British troops deployed along the 14-mile long frontier. One of their first tasks was to screen the arrivals of refugees, as well as disarming many fleeing Nationalist units.

When the British reasserted their control over Hong Kong at the Japanese capitulation, in addition to landing infantry units, they also set up an air component based at the Kai Tak AB, with as detachment base, Sek Kong airfield on the New Territories. Disembarking on 15 September 1945 from the carrier HMS *Smiter* was the RAF No. 132 Fighter Squadron equipped with Spitfire XIVs. The unit was reinforced 12 days later by the No 681 Fighter Squadron on Spitfire PR. XIs. The presence of the two fighter squadrons was rather short-lived, being withdrawn and disbanded, respectively on 15 April 1946 and 23 December 1945. Remaining in Hong Kong until the summer of 1949, were only the No. 110 Transport Squadron on Dakotas and the No. 88 Flying Boat Transport Squadron on Short Sunderland Mk.Vs. There was also a detachment of Auster AOP. 6s of the 656th Squadron for air observation and liaison missions.

The Sunderlands of the No 88 Squadron were involved in the HMS *Amethyst* incident on 20 April 1949 when she was cruising on the Yangtze River. From 22 to 24 April, two Sunderlands operating from Shanghai, alighted near the stranded ship under Communist fire to bring in supplies and a medical team and suffered damages.

With the deteriorating situation, it was decided to send in a detachment of the No 28 Fighter Squadron on Spitfire FR.18s under the command of Squadron Leader R. D. Yule as reinforcement. The unit left Singapore on 11 May 1949. This was only a temporary deployment awaiting the arrival of the allocated unit to Hong Kong, the No 80 Fighter Squadron on Spitfires F.24s. The unit was part of the British occupation forces in West Germany at Gutersloh.

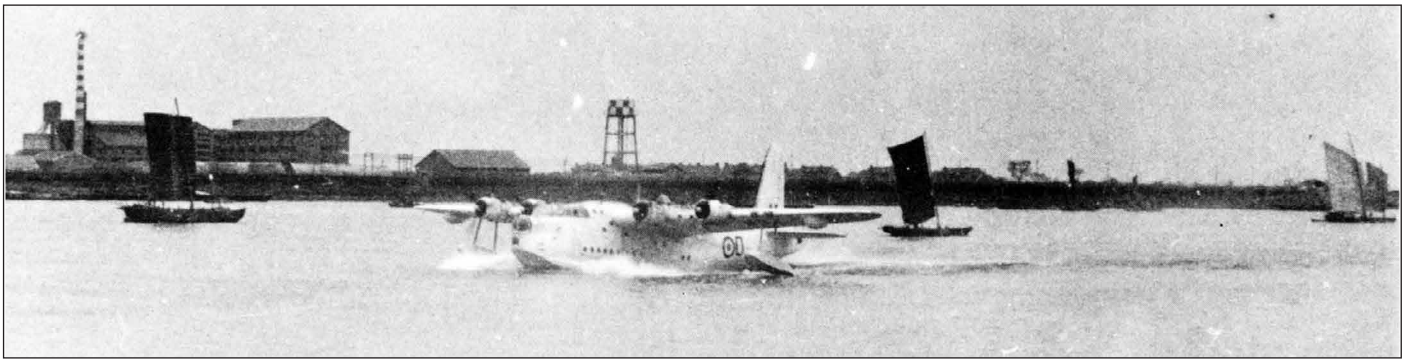
The Spitfires were loaded on the carrier HMS *Ocean* and were disembarked at Hong Kong on 12 July 1949. The unit was immediately put on alert, flying standing protection patrols, practising ground attacks with 250lb bombs and rockets. They also flew low sweep demonstration flights on the fringes of the Hong Kong territories where skirmishes took place between the Hong Kong Police and uncontrolled armed bands. A new height in tension was reached on 6 January 1950 when London officially recognised the People's Republic of China, the first Western country to do so.

The Chinese Nationalist government in Taiwan reacted angrily and threatened to attack Hong Kong. The threat was taken seriously and the No 80 Squadron was put on alert for any air raids from the CNAF. A local Hong Kong newspaper even interviewed a CNAF P-51 pilot and holder of the American Distinguished Flying Cross, a Major Leng Pei Shu, who told reporters that he was eager to attack the British Spitfires in Hong Kong. No attack came even if several groups of CNAF B24s and B-25s skirted Hong Kong's airspace en route to bomb Canton, now in the hands of the Communists. The unit flew Spitfires until December 1951 when they were replaced by De Haviland Hornets.

Communist hands. The CAT itself had two C-47s and 10 C-46s in Hong Kong that Chennault arranged to fly out.

Willauer flew from Hong Kong to Taipei on 10 November for discussion with the Generalissimo. He offered a scheme which would involve transfer of ownership of CNAC and CATC from the Nationalist government to an American company, to be incorporated by Chennault and Willauer. Peking (Beijing) was also claiming the planes and it was feared they might be used later in an airborne assault against Taiwan. Here the situation remained precarious, with riots against the massive arrival of refugees and troops from the mainland. Not only did the defection place Taiwan in danger from an airborne assault but it also represented a severe political defeat that could be fatal for Nationalist morale. Willauer explained:

> Already many people have been constantly worrying about how they can escape if the Communist win. Until the defection of the airlines all these people felt sure they could get out by air. As long as they had this feeling of ultimate security, they were willing to



The first Sunderland Mk.V used in the rescue attempt of the frigate HMS *Amethyst*, taking off from the Whang Poo river, Shanghai, 24 April 1949. (RAF)

Two Spitfire F.24s of the No. 80 Fighter Squadron returning to the Kai Tak AB, Hong Kong, in October 1949 after a patrol. The mechanics are preparing another flight of fighters to be launched. (RAF)

> stay at their jobs and fight to the end. Now this means of escape by air seems cut off. Unless something can be done at once, panic may spread throughout China, Taiwan, and Hainan.

Returning to Hong Kong, Willauer lost no time in putting his 'neutralization program', into effect. On 16 November, he personally led a group of CAT pilots and crew chiefs in a midnight foray to the airport, where they immobilised the stranded aircraft, at least temporarily, by letting all the air out of the tyres. He also let it be known that he did not hesitate to drive trucks across the path of any aircraft that attempted to take off. He finally hired a squad of 20 Sikh guards to prevent the removal of the airplanes.

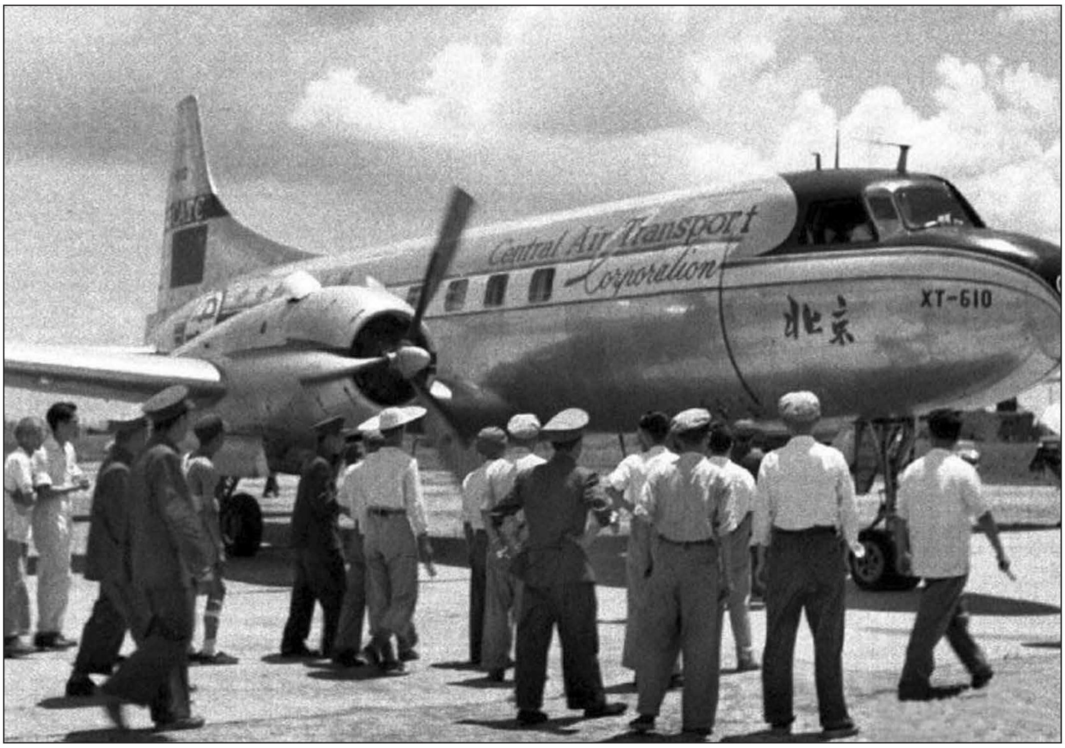
The British authorities in Hong Kong, fearing a direct Communist intervention, were reluctant to let the fleet leave for Taiwan. The Lower Court in Hong Kong then awarded the whole fleet to Peking (Beijing). Chennault was resolute to act on behalf of Taipei and did not give up so came with another idea: placing the airplanes under American registration. If that failed, he was ready to stage another raid with the CAT mechanics to sabotage the planes.

Although the US government was not officially involved in the scheme, it could support what was at least, apparently, American citizens or corporations involved in a commercial operation. Corcoran put together a complicated organisational structure for the operation. At the top of the table of organisation stood C.A.T., S.A., incorporated under the liberal Panamanian laws that afforded tax, secrecy and other desirable benefits. Civil Air Transport, Inc. (CATI), was then incorporated under Delaware laws to act as C.A.T., S.A.'s nominee in the legal battle to follow. As ownership of the disputed must appear to be American, the relationship between C.A.T., S.A., and CATI was kept secret. The purpose was not only to recover the aircraft but also all the assets of the two grounded airlines, including frozen bank balances and other property.

Negotiations were opened with the Nationalist government but to Willauer's chagrin, Taipei insisted on a purchase price (on paper) equal to the fair market value of the two companies. As a result, Willauer signed on behalf of Chennault and gave himself personal promissory notes for $4.75 million on 12 December. Meanwhile, the State Department had ordered Pan American to sell its remaining 20 percent interest in CNAC to the Nationalist government for $1,250,000. Chennault quickly faced a financial crisis. He needed money to pay preliminary legal costs and to bribe pro-Communists technicians with access to the disputed aircraft, for information on registration numbers and other data required by the US Civil Aviation Administration, in order to issue American documentations. The expenses were, however, covered by the CIA through the mediation of Alfred T. Cox.

Even though the airplanes were finally put under US registration and were given US airworthiness certificates, the Hong Kong authorities eventually decided to seize the fleet while waiting for diplomatic developments. The United Kingdom finally recognised the People's Republic of China on 6 January 1950. Peking again insisted on the return of the aircraft but under intense Washington pressure, London withheld its decision. In April, some 1,000 tons of aviation spare parts were loaded on a ship, ready to be sent to the mainland. The Nationalist government demonstrated its concern by sending agents, with the tacit approval of the CIA, to Hong Kong to sabotage the aircraft.

A flight of Spitfire F.24s of the No. 80 Fighter Squadron seen patrolling over Hong Kong in early 1950. (RAF)



On 9 November, the staff of the CATC decided to switch sides and joined the Communists with part of the company's stranded aircraft in Hong Kong. Some 12 transport planes (8 C-47s, three C-46s, and a Convair 240) from the airline took off for Tientsin. The Convair CV 240 seen here on its arrival. Note the aircraft was already painted on its tail with the new People's Republic of China flag. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Timed bombs went off at Kai Tak airport on the morning of 2 April, damaging seven transports. The British suspended the operation. The State Department and even President Truman appealed to Prime Minister Clement Attlee concerning the matter. On 10 May, the British government issued an Order-in-Council, instructing Hong Kong officials to retain possession of the disputed aircraft until the question of ownership had been decided 'by full processes of law'. The order ensured a lengthy period of litigation in the Hong Kong courts with final right of appeal to the Privy Council in London, a process that could take years. Even if they could not immediately recover the aircraft, Chennault, Corcoran and Willauer celebrated. At least, the impounded airplanes could not be used by the Communists.

However, stored outdoors for several years, and prey to looters scavenging for spare parts, the planes' condition quickly deteriorated. From all the aircraft that found refuge in Hong Kong, CAT managed to add one to its fleet: a C-47 owned by the Lutheran World Mission and christened 'Saint Paul'. CAT pilot Felix Smith had flown it after the Second Worlds War, before joining Chennault. Diplomats took over and the United States appealed against the Lower Court's decision and the British Privy Council, finally, ordered the aircraft stranded in Hong Kong to be returned to USA. The fleet, or what was left of it, was taken back to Santa Barbara by a US aircraft carrier in 1951, by which time very little of it was still flyable or even repairable. The CV-240s were sold at a good price.

Meanwhile, Chennault had put a section of the CAT personnel on leave of absence without pay, except for a small staff and 10 flight crews. The company relocated to Taipei at Sungshan airport. Maintenance was more difficult. CAT's LST and supply barge, crammed with equipment salvaged during the hasty evacuations, docked at the port city of Kaoshiung, 185 miles south of Taipei. The Nationalist government then allowed CAT to operate from Tainan, also a major CNAF base

From November 1949, many pro-Communist Chinese mechanics began painting the People's Republic of China flag on the tails of CATC and CNAC aircraft stranded in Hong Kong, as on this C-46 of the latter airline. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

and closer to Kaoshiung. Just before leaving Hong Kong, Chennault had the foresight to hire Hugh L. Grundy, CNAC's chief engineer who helped to reorganise the company's maintenance.

Limited domestic flights with C-47s started in Taiwan in February but that was not enough to sustain the incomes. Chennault went to see Madame Chiang Kai Shek, Premier Chen Cheng, Foreign Minister Yeh Kung Chao and Minister of Communications, Ho Chung Han for help and the need to give CAT enough business to keep going during the crucial weeks ahead. The Chinese government would engage CAT's entire service for May, June, and July 1950, advancing $250,000 each month. Meanwhile, Chennault was forced to reduce the active fleet to six C-46s and one C-47.

In fact, it seemed that the practically bankrupt company was at the end of the road. In the meantime, Willauer went to see Frank Wisner, the head of OPC, on 12 December1949 to seek help and a new contract to pursue the CAT operations. However, instead of punctual contracts for specific CIA operations, Wisner saw the possibility of outrightly acquiring CAT. He was supported by Corcoran who had developed an imaginative scheme to operate an airline for the CIA on the periphery of Communist China. This plan envisioned the creation of a giant air complex by combining CAT's fleet with the CNAC – CATC aircraft in Hong Kong. Corcoran presented the scheme to Chennault and Willauer:

On 2 April 1950, a group of Nationalist agents infiltrated the Kai Tak airport and set off timed bombs to damage the aircraft that the Communists sought after. The photo shows the damage to the tail of one of the CNAC C-46s. (UTD)

The CIA finally decided to acquire the CAT in July 1950 for its paramilitary operations in Asia. By all public appearances, CAT continued to operate as a normal airline, with President Whiting Willauer (left) and Alfred T. Cox (right), vice president and representative of the Agency. (William M. Leary Collection)

> I think we've got an idea going for our 100 plane line "Oregon" (CIA's nickname) owned but operated by you over the whole

N8421C
CIVIL AIR TRANSPORT
CAT

In order to protect the CAT aircraft based in Hong Kong, Chennault succeeded putting them under US registration with US airworthiness certificates. However, the Hong Kong authorities eventually decided to seize the fleet when London recognised the People's Republic of China on 6 January 1950. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

> peripheral arc from Korea to Japan to Okinawa to Formosa, Manila, Hong Kong, Indochina, Siam (Thailand), Malaya, NEI (Dutch Indonesia) and possibly on through Pakistan to Turkey' [and it would be best to] get out of ownership and into management of the equipment for Oregon's account, because this is no longer commerce but war.

With hindsight, it was what the CAT would become in the next decade. True to his reputation of being a tough negotiator and lobbyist, Corcoran stepped up the pressure on the CIA. Without immediate financial assistance, he announced at a meeting with OPC officials on 10 January 1950, that the airline would have to be liquidated. The government must act immediately if CAT was to be saved for official use. Joined by Willauer who came to Washington, Corcoran dropped a bombshell during a new meeting with CIA on 20 February: CAT's owners would have to act at once regarding several alternatives. They could sell the company to the Chinese Communists or to a third party who would sell to Peking; they could sell to the United States government, overtly or covertly; or they could liquidate on the open market. Even if selling to Peking was unlikely had such an arrangement been possible. However, their threats put Wisner under great pressure: OPC – CIA would have to decide about CAT.

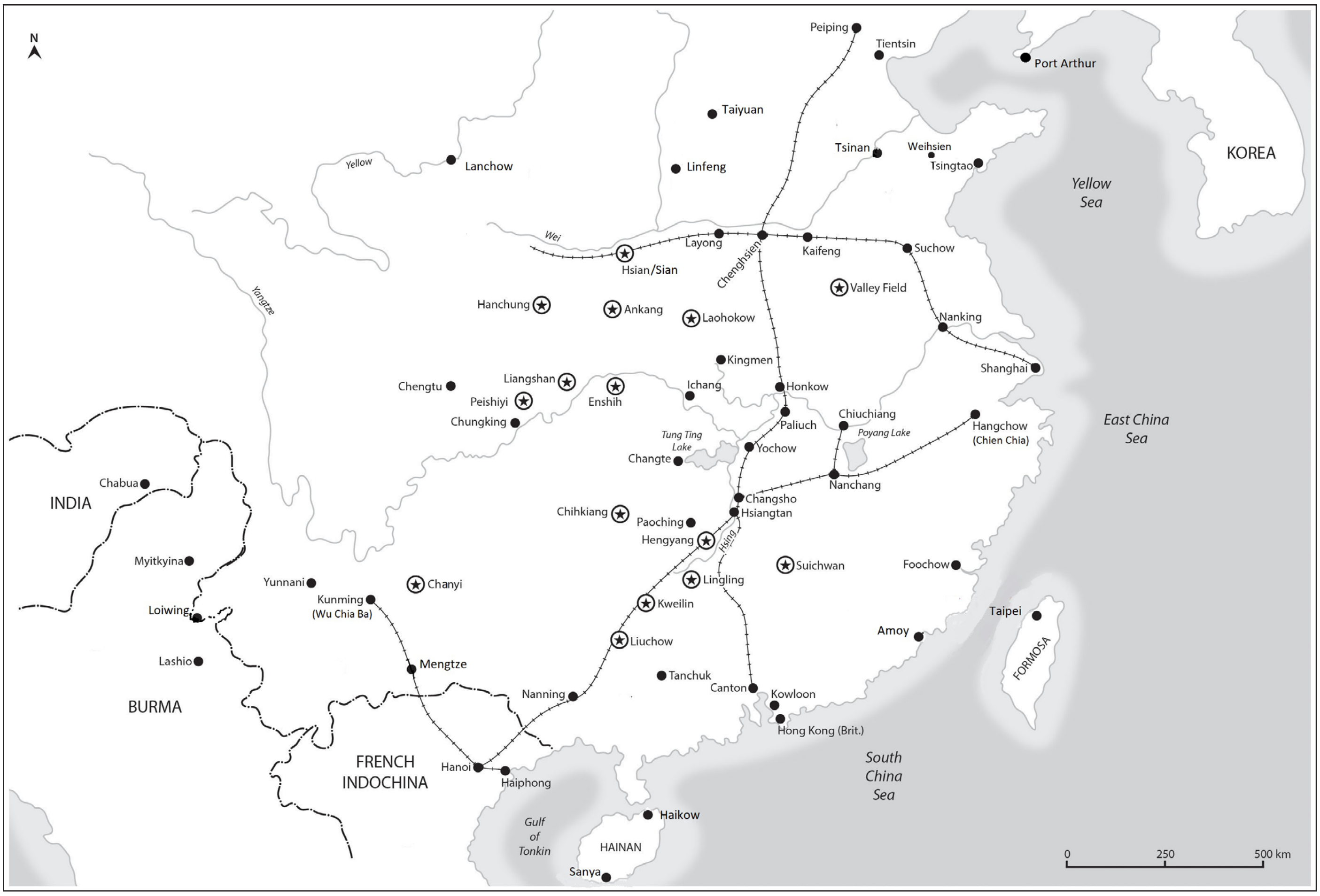
The days following this meeting saw long and heated discussions at the CIA. It appeared that continued support of CAT was in the national interest. This view was reinforced from February 1950, after the Soviet Union and China signed a defence pact, President Truman signed National Security Directive 64, which stated, 'It is important to the United States security interests that all practical measures be taken to prevent further communist expansion in Southeast Asia'. Whilst the State Department pledged to use all its 'political resources' in the battle against Communist aggression, the Joint Chief of Staff (JCS) chimed in with a series of recommendations to counter the spread of communist revolutions. Although the JCS emphasised overt military assistance to friendly governments, their plans included 'a programme of special covert operations designed to interfere with Communist activities in Southeast Asia'.

Therefore, owing an airline, operating under the flag of the Republic of China and now exiled in Taiwan, would be useful for the CIA in its operations in Asia. Although the personnel were Americans, Chennault's close ties with the Nationalists and Chiang Kai Shek, along with CAT's new headquarters in Taipei, created plausible deniability. Furthermore, whilst the prospects appeared bleak, with many analysts fearing that Taiwan would fall before the end of 1950, new information received in late February and early March, suggested the possibility of somewhat longer survival of the Nationalist Island should not be excluded.

It was within this context that Wisner began negotiating the purchase of the CAT with Corcoran in the same month. In March, the CIA paid CAT $350,000 to clear up arrearage, $400,000 for future operations and a $1 million option on the business. CAT's value, set after lengthy negotiations, later became a festering source of controversy between the CIA and CAT's owners. Willauer always contended that the CIA had snapped up the airline at a bargain price; he placed the 'real' worth of the business at between $7 and $8 million. Critics countered that CAT was a bankrupt company with obsolete equipment and limited prospects that would have folded without agency backing. The airline then had 19 C-46s, one C-47, and four Cessna 195s. Seventeen C-46s were older 'A' and 'D' models that would require modification of control surfaces, costing $15,000 each, to bring them up to 'F' standards. There were also the LST as a floating workshop and a stock of spare parts but the whole value would certainly not be worth the claimed $4 million. In fact, the CAT's owners had been lucky to find a buyer at any price.

The CAT official changing of owner, its purchase with all the aircraft for $4.75 million, was formalised on10 July1950, through the Civil Air Transport Incorporated (CATI). This was not to be confused with CATI the company formed by Corcoran and also registered in the state of Delaware for the acquisition of the CNAC and CATC. This in turn, was operated by a new holding company, American Airdale Corporation. The money was then divided among the airline's owners, with Corcoran and Yougman receiving more than $100,000 for six years of legal fees, in addition Corcoran and Yougman dividing approximately $225,000 from the sale of the airline. The Chinese owners, represented by Wang Wen San banker, received $220,000. Chennault received $25,000 and Willauer $29,000.

The transition from CAT to CAT Incorporated went smoothly. The same initial decorated the fuselages of the airline's C-46s and were used in advertising. In reality, CAT was a 'proprietary', a seemingly independent company that was actually CIA owned. This new commercial entity benefitted from the very liberal business laws implemented in Delaware. Actually, for the years to come, Delaware was to become a convenient haven for several other companies working for the CIA. Paul Helliwell, who was the chief of the Far East Division of the CIA was put in charge of this operation. His deputy was Desmond Fitzgerald, the executive officer for OPC's Far East Division, in charge of helping Chiang Kai Shek to resist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Layong
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Chenghsien
Kaifeng
Suchow
Yangtze
Hanchung
Ankang
Laohokow
Valley Field
Nanking
Kingmen
Shanghai
Chengtu
Liangshan
Enshih
Ichang
Honkow
Peishiyi
Chungking
Paliuch
Chiuchiang
Poyang Lake
Hangchow (Chien Chia)
East China Sea
Tung Ting Lake
Yochow
Changte
Chabua
INDIA
Nanchang
Changsho
Hsiangtan
Chihkiang
Paoching
Hengyang
Hsing
Myitkyina
Suichwan
Foochow
Lingling
Yunnani
Chanyi
Kunming (Wu Chia Ba)
Loiwing
Kweilin
Taipei
Amoy
Liuchow
FORMOSA
Lashio
Mengtze
Tanchuk
Canton
Kowloon
BURMA
Nanning
Hong Kong (Brit.)
FRENCH INDOCHINA
Hanoi
Haiphong
South China Sea
Gulf of Tonkin
Haikow
HAINAN
Sanya
0
250
500 km

Map-3: A map depicting southern China in early 1949 showing the main cities, railways, and airfield used by the CNAF. (Map drawn by George Anderson)

Chinese Communists and supporting anti-Communist forces inside China. For its secret war against China, the CIA set up Western Enterprise Incorporated (WEI), an office in charge of coordinating paramilitary operations in liaison with the CAT, again under the cover a commercial company.

Chief Engineer Grundy, Chief Pilot Rousselot and other supervisory personnel, stayed at their posts. Chennault posed a problem for the CIA who wanted to capitalise on his friendship with Chiang Kai Shek to ensure continued good relations between CAT and the Nationalist government. However, many officials in Washington distrusted the intimacy between the general and the Generalissimo, fearing that certain covert operations involving anti-Communists but not pro-Nationalist groups on the mainland ('Third Force'), might be revealed to Taipei. The CIA attempted to solve this problem by advancing Chennault to the Chairman of the Board, an empty title.

Although still able to exert some influence on basic decisions, Chennault had no operational responsibility for the airline and was used, for the most part, only when problems developed with the Chinese government. However, the independent Chennault would remain a thorny issue for the Agency until the end. Chennault settled in Taipei with his new Chinese wife, a journalist from the China Central News Agency, Chan Sheng Mai (Chen Xianmei) whom he married in December 1947. Anna Chennault would later become a prominent pro-Taiwan lobbyist in Washington and was in close connection with the Republican Party. Willauer became President of CAT.

The first indication of the new management was the appearance of high-ranking strangers at CAT's Taipei headquarters. Alfred T. Cox was the new vice president, closely seconding Willauer, as well as serving as the new 'chief executive officer'. He also conveniently retained his responsibility for OPC's covert activities in East Asia. John Mason from the CIA was 'special assistant to the president'. There was also a new 'director of traffic' from the agency as well as a financial supervisor. At an informal meeting soon afterwards, some of the CAT pilots complained about the newcomers. Having already flown CIA agents elsewhere in China, it took no time for them to realise they were men of the Agency. Robert E. Rousselot, CAT's chief pilot, became angry and warned them: 'I don't want to hear you guys say CIA. Not ever again. Not even to each other. If you have to refer to the organisation, just call them our customers. You'll have me to reckon with'.

In parallel, in January 1950, CAT was also reorganised, taking over the financial assets of the disbanded CNAC and CATC, and becoming the de facto Taiwan national flag carrier. By all public appearances, CAT continued to operate as a normal airline, carrying passengers and cargo on a regular schedule to Japan, Okinawa, Iwo Jima, Guam and other points in the Far East.

21

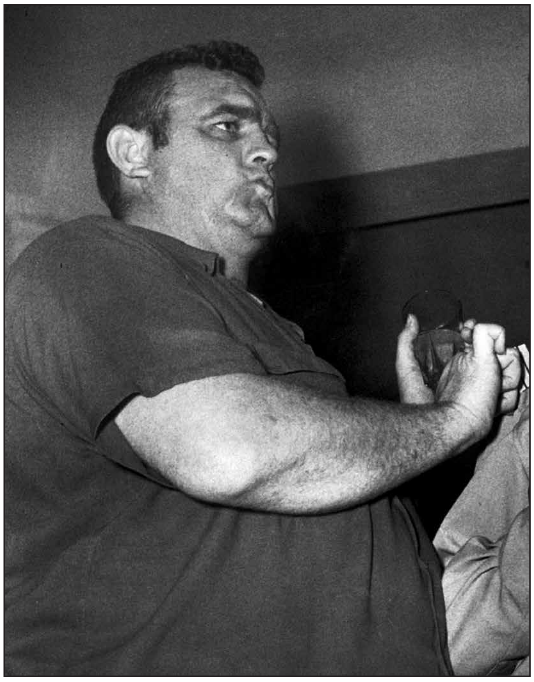
A FAREWELL TO CHINA

During the last weeks of 1949, when the CIA was looking to acquire CAT, the airline continued its operations from the remaining Nationalist strongholds in southern China, including Kweilin (Guilin), Kweiyang (Guiyang), Nanning, Chengtu (Chengdu) and Mengtze (Mengzi). From Mengtze, CAT's airplanes flew out tin concentrates, four times a day, extracted from the local mines to Haiphong. It had taken over a year to overcome all the administrative hurdles that prevented international flights between Mengtze and French Indochina and the service had only started on June 1949. On one of these flights, C-47 XT-805 experienced engine failure and crashed. The pilot, Norman R. Jones, was killed but co-pilot M. H. Kung, and radio operator K.V. Chin had managed to bail out. Unfortunately, the latter was reportedly captured and beheaded by hostile Lolo (Yi) tribesmen, whilst the luckier co-pilot was guided to safety by another group of tribesmen.

CAT's main operations base was now Sanya on Hainan Island. This airfield was shared with a squadron of Mosquito fighter-bombers from the CNAF 1st Medium Bomber Group that was still conducting raids deep into mainland China. This was in addition to the Nationalist B-24 and B-25, operating from Taiwan, which bombed enemy depots at Nanking (Nanjing), Canton (Guangdong) and particularly Shanghai, with for example 17 B-24Ms hitting the city on 25 January, causing much collateral damage.

Overall, the working conditions for CAT became harder, as local authorities often impounded the fuel reserves at airports and asked for bribes from the airlines. It also become a regular occurrence to see local officials threaten the crews and station managers for free passage to safer regions. Moreover, due to the defection of the CNAC and CATC and after the grounding of the remainder of their fleets in Hong Kong, CAT was the only airline left to meet the air transport demands of the Nationalist armed forces and administration. As CAT's fleet was not sufficient for the huge task, some airplanes had to be leased from foreign airlines, such as Cathay Pacific Airways Ltd., Hong Kong Airways and Pacific Overseas Airways Siam.

The Nationalist forces eventually evacuated Chungking (Chongqing) on 30 November. CAT was involved in the evacuation operations from Peishiyi (Baishiyi) air base, located some 25km away behind a hill range. Most of the evacuation flights were to Chengtu (Chengdu), in Sichuan Province, located only an hour away. At the air base, the climate of uncertainty and fear turned into panic and on 29 November, CAT Operations Manager, Bill Severt, had all the remaining technical equipment hastily loaded into 3 C-46s.Anxiously, he waited for all the employees left inside the city to reach the airport. They arrived after nightfall in a long column of vehicles. Some shots were heard as they approached. Some pilots started to load crates of local money, found 'without their owner'.



CAT pilot James B. McGovern was captured by the Communists on 5 December 1949 when his C-46 made an emergency landing near Liuchow. He was freed six months later in June 1950. Nicknamed 'Earthquake McGoon', this time he tricked destiny but would be shot down and killed four years later at Dien Bien Phu in French Indochina, still flying for CAT. (Felix Smith Collection)

By the end of 1949, CAT moved its operations to Sanya, Hainan Island, in the Gulf of Tonkin. Shown here is the airfield at Sanya. It operated there until April 1950 when it was forced out to Taiwan. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Another captured CAT pilot was Bob Buol, at Mengtze (Mengzi), on 16 January1950. He remained in captivity until September 1955 but died only 8 months after his release due to bad detention conditions during his captivity. He is seen here with his wife, shortly before his capture. (Felix Smith Collection)

They were ordered to disembark them. Two of them reluctantly complied, whilst the third refused. He was fired on the spot.

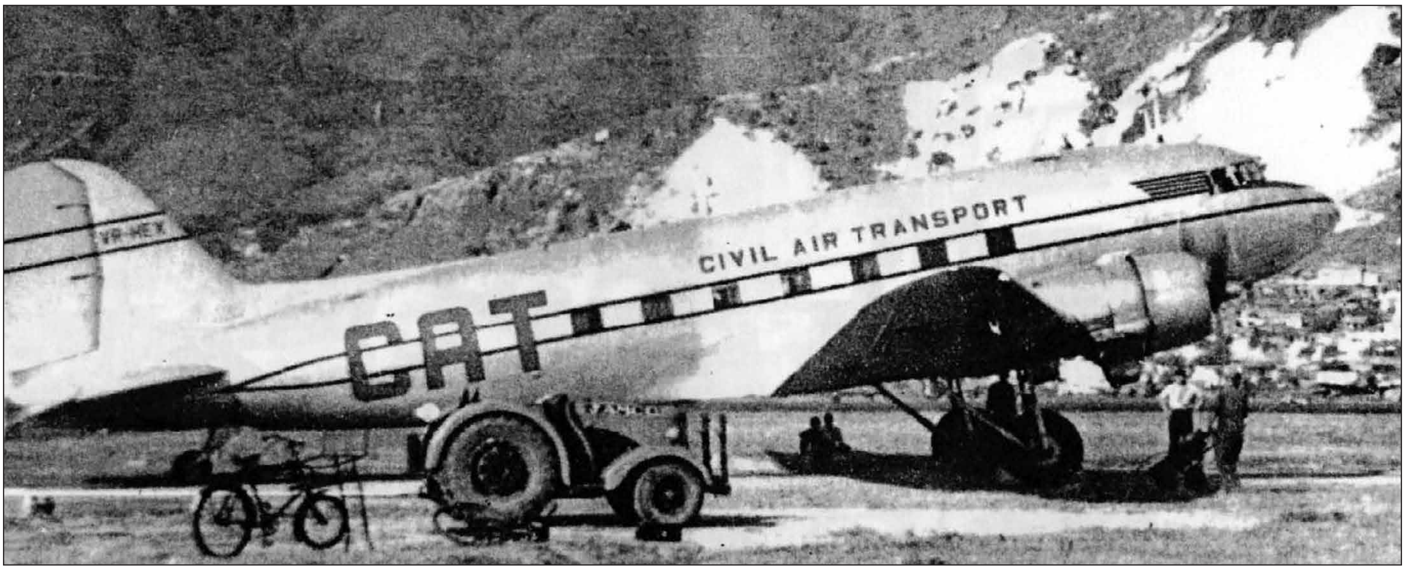
Chengtu (Chengdu) did not hold for any longer, the city was evacuated on 10 December. The CAT personnel had to negotiate with local Nationalist soldiers who came to steal their fuel stocks. Finally, after tensions and discussions, the five present C-46s could depart. Meanwhile, CAT experienced another accident; one of its C-46s, XT-812, made an emergency landing near Liuchow (Liuzhou) in Kwangsi (Guangxi) on 5 December. Luckily, nobody on board was wounded but the crew was captured by Communist irregulars. The pilot, James B. McGovern, was a corpulent and colourful figure, nicknamed 'Earthquake McGoon' after a character from the famous period comic strip Li'l Abner. He had served as a fighter pilot in China during the Second World War with the 14th Air Force and was known for his flying skills. Having made himself a nuisance to his guards during his captivity, he was freed six months later in June 1950. McGovern related that he had managed to convince his guards to free him, but the legend has it that it was because they could not feed him.

Whilst the fall of Chungking (Chongqing) was not a surprise, the ensuing rapid loss of Kunming came as a shock. Governor Lu Han was in charge of the capital of Yunnan Province Interestingly, he had led the Nationalist Chinese troops that occupied the northern part of French Indochina until March 1946. To deprive him of his powerbase in his province, most of his troops were nearly shipped to Manchuria. Since then, Lu Han harboured resentments against Chiang Kai Shek. When asked by the American Consul regarding the situation in Chungking, Lu Han guaranteed that, if things deteriorated, he would be able to warn them two weeks ahead. In the worst of cases, he even assured them that American citizens would have at least three days to evacuate the city.

Suddenly, on 10 December, the city authorities announced that they had rallied the Communists. The ex-Nationalist soldiers occupied the airport and seized two C-46s, one C-47, and one DC-4 belonging to CAT. The crews and ground personnel were taken prisoner. Chennault then sent a telegram to Governor Lu Han, recalling their past friendship and reminding him of the assistance Lu Han and the Chinese received during the war against the Japanese. Eventually, the governor released the CAT aircraft and personnel. As Communist columns were moving closer towards Kunming, CAT's planes left, one by one. The C-46 piloted by Var M. Green had to wait a little longer for Vice-consul Lutkins and his staff to embark. The take-off was arduous and Green had to use the full length of the runway. The reason for this became clear when they landed in Hainan: eight Nationalist soldiers had been hiding in the cargo area.

For all practical purposes, the CAT had no bases left on mainland China and operated only from Hainan and Taiwan. Despite all his efforts to support the Nationalists, the civil war was on the verge of coming to its conclusion with a definitive victory for the Communist forces. The foreign military observers judged the performances of the CNAF sternly, particularly when compared to the records of the American led CACW during the Second World War. Whilst it would have played a key role and despite American assistance, it did not render valuable support in ground operations and its capabilities were not properly employed. Operating without centralised control, put under control of army officers having no knowledge in the use of air assets, its efforts were scattered whilst the weakest point was the logistical support of its squadrons, dispersed throughout the country. The American Air Advisory Division pointed out:

> The CNAF has questionable value as a military ally mainly because of their inability to conduct their administrative and



By early 1950, CAT was short on available aircraft, with many impounded in Hong Kong. The airline was forced to operate leased aircraft like this Hong Kong registered C-47, formerly belonging to Hong Kong Airways. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

> logistical function satisfactorily. Furthermore, in order to save aircraft and pilots, the CNAF's bombing operations were usually conducted from such an altitude that accurate bombing of military targets was impossible. The Nationalists took the habit to bomb mercilessly by vengeance the cities they were forced out, inflicting heavy casualties to the civilians. It was only the transport operations that gained some measures of successes by supplying encircled garrisons and cities.

The Communists had a less severe judgement, recognising that the CNAF had caused them many difficulties. According to their records, during a three-year war period, from June 1946 to June 1949, the Nationalists flew 66,239 attack sorties. It is estimated approximately that from 1946 to May 1950, the Nationalists lost 379 aircraft. From July 1946 to June 1947, three aircraft were captured and three were shot down. From July 1947 to June 1948, 10 captured and 81 shot down. From July 1948 to June 1949, 121 captured including those deserted. From July 1949 to June 1950, 55 captured including those deserted and 21 shot down.

Quite amazingly and before the curtain fell, the round trips to carry the tin extracted from the Mengtze mines, 150km south of Kunming, lasted until early 1950. With most of mainland China already under Communist control, this city still resisted and airplanes continued their shuttle trips between this mining area and Haiphong in Tonkin and Hainan. Eventually, the Communists took over the city of Mengtze (Mengzi) on 16 January1950. They captured CAT pilot Bob Buol, who was manning a radio beacon, mechanic Jose Jawbert and six Chinese employees. A C-46 had been dispatched to fetch them, but it arrived too late. The airfield was already in enemy hands and the plane was shot at. Despite being wounded by the gunfire, pilot Henry Davis managed to take off and leave the area.

Bob Buol remained in captivity until September 1955 when he was handed over at the Hong Kong border. After a trip to the United States to reunite with his family, Buol travelled to France to meet his three French co-detainees who had been captured by the Chinese at the Yunnan border. While vacationing in the hometown of one of them in the Pyrenees Mountains, Buol died of a severe lung congestion, only 8 months after the Communists had freed him.

Operations on Hainan Island became increasingly dangerous due to intense Communist guerrilla activity. On 17 April 1950, four Communist divisions boarded 170 motorised junks and landed at several locations on the island. Within four days, they managed to neutralise the small Nationalist garrison supported by six B-25s and seven armed AT-6s stationed at Haikow (Haikou). The last Nationalist troops embarked for Taiwan at Yulin harbour. Meanwhile, at Sanya airport, the last CAT flights were leaving. Farewell China.

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